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THE JEWS OF AFRICA



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THE JEWS OF AFRICA

*Especially in the Sixteenth and
Seventeenth Centuries*

BY
SIDNEY MENDELSSOHN,
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*Mendelssohn's South African Bibliography, The Jews of Asia,
Jewish Pioneers of South Africa, etc.*

WITH A PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR

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MEMOIR OF AUTHOR

SIDNEY MENDELSSOHN died in London after an illness of some months' duration on September 26th, 1917. He had retired from business, that of a diamond merchant in South Africa, about twelve years earlier, and had come to England, there to devote his leisure to reading, to public work, and above all to the collection of his magnificent library of works on South Africa and the compilation of his priceless bibliography based on that collection.

Sidney Mendelssohn was born at Bristol, the son of the minister of the not very numerous Jewish community there. The community being small the means of the minister were not large. However, the care of Jewish parents for the education of their children is proverbial, and this devotion to education which is so general among Jews is, not surprisingly, even more strongly developed among the class to which the parents of the subject of this memoir belonged. Young Mendelssohn therefore had the best education that it was within the means of his parents to give him, and in this connection it must be remembered that his father was a scholar and was therefore able to supplement the instruction which the boy received at school. However, in view of his financial resources he was unable to keep the boy at school as long as he would have wished or to send him to a university, and in those days scholarships tenable at a university for which boys such as Mendelssohn were eligible were very

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few and far between, and consequently the boy, like so many of his class and of his day, had to go out early into the world, there to make a way for himself.

When he was still little more than a boy his father went to South Africa, leaving his wife, two daughters, and two younger sons to the care of the subject of this memoir. Sidney Mendelssohn thereupon undertook as much of the work of his father as he could perform. He used to spend hours when other boys of his age were asleep or engaged in recreation in preparing the subjects he had to teach to his pupils on the following day. In due course the boy and the other members of the family followed the father to South Africa. Kimberley was then the El Dorado of British Jewry and it was to Kimberley that young Mendelssohn betook himself. In South Africa, as has already been indicated, he secured for himself a successful career which enabled him to return to England in early middle age with a moderate fortune. In illustration of his life in South Africa we may mention that Sidney-on-Vaal was so named in his honour, and that the public library of the town is a standing monument of his munificence and interest in literature.

Careers such as those of Sidney Mendelssohn are on the whole uneventful so far as the interest of the general public is concerned, and the present case is not exceptional. His literary activities after his return to England are practically the only ones that are of general interest. Mention ought, however, also to be made of the zealous work he performed on behalf of the Liberal Jewish movement and of Anglo-Jewish historical research. An ardent Jew, Mendelssohn, immediately upon taking up his residence in London, became a warm supporter of the former movement, then in its first stages in England, and was for some years prior to his death treasurer of the Liberal Synagogue. He was also during the last years of his life an active

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member of the Council of the Jewish Historical Society of England, to whose *Transactions* he contributed a valuable sketch of the history of the Jews in South Africa. Before he left that part of the world he was prominent in masonic circles. Easily first among his literary works is his monumental *Bibliography of South African Literature*, a work which is as complete as any human work can be. Mr. Ian D. Colvin, who wrote an introduction to this work, which, without any fear of exaggeration, may be termed great, said of it after its author's death, "The Mendelssohn *Bibliography* describes in detail practically every book, pamphlet, and paper that in any way concerns South Africa from the time of Vasco da Gama downwards. And it is so arranged, classified, and indexed as to enable the student to find what has been written upon any South African place or problem. It is a guide to the student of South Africa; it is the foundation of a South African culture". This praise is high but not higher than the work deserves.

The *Bibliography* was based on a collection of books, which is itself the largest collection of South African literature in existence and is now, in accordance with the terms of the collector's will, the property of the Union of South Africa. Mr. Colvin, writing on the same occasion, said, "As a collector he was omnivorous. He was in touch with every old bookshop of note in Europe; and went through their catalogues with the eye of a hawk. No doubt his collection contains much that is worthless upon any computation but that of the student who says he wants to read everything on the subject—and there are such students. South Africa will one day have a literature of its own, and a body of scholarship concentrated upon its history, its problems, its humanity, its interests and what we might call its spirit or soul. That body of investigation and expression, that South African scholarship will find the

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past of the country, as far as it is known, all charted and mapped out in Mendelssohn's *Bibliography*".

Sidney Mendelssohn's other writings include *Judaic or Semitic Legends and Customs amongst the South African Natives*, which appeared originally in the *Journal of the African Society and Jewish Pioneers of South Africa* in the *Transactions* of the Jewish Historical Society of England. When the subject of this memoir died the manuscript on which the present work and its companion volume¹ are based was far advanced towards completion. His widow, aware of the interest her husband had shown in the work, of the devotion with which he had engaged in it, and how great was his natural desire that the results of his years of research should be made public, determined that the work should be completed and published. This task was entrusted to the present writer, who in fulfilling it has considered it his duty to preserve intact the scheme that the author had adopted and to publish with as few changes as possible those portions of the work which the author had apparently considered ready for the press. In these chapters obvious slips and errors only have been corrected. Otherwise the work is untouched. But in a few instances the Editor has added footnotes of his own. These are indicated by square brackets. Two fragments, apparently intended to form part of the Preface, were found among the Author's papers, and it has been thought well to quote them in full as indicating the scope and intention of the work.

"It is not my intention to attempt an account of the Jews in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What I propose to lay before my readers is an account of the Jewish people at this period, as mirrored in the works of English writers who describe

¹ *The Jews of Asia* (Kegan Paul).

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the life of Jews not only in England but in other parts of the world in which they have travelled ”.

“ My work must be considered more a mosaic than an individual literary effort. I have tried to select from the works of many historians such pieces of information as taken together form a connected, coherent, and—to a certain extent—correct record of what has really occurred ”.

Sidney Mendelssohn was not a scholar in the technical sense, but he had in him an admiration, a passion, for scholarship. The present work, therefore, is neither learned nor scholarly. It contains little that is original. But it furnishes a record of the Author's very wide reading and of the interest and care that he devoted to that reading. The learned critic may find many opportunities in the following pages for airing his superior knowledge, but no one can deny that the compiler of the present work has collected between two covers very much interesting and useful matter relating to the history of the Jews in Africa which would otherwise have remained hidden. If Mendelssohn has not written a history of the Jewish people in this continent, he has provided in an easily accessible form much material that will prove invaluable to the historian who will one day or other take up the task.

A. M. H.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

IN spite of the fact that even since the final destruction of the Jewish kingdom by the Romans the aims, ideas and, in some instances, even the ideals of the Jews in the various countries in which they have settled have been often divergent and at times bitterly opposed, the many histories of them which have appeared since the time of Josephus have almost invariably represented them as one people as well as of one race and one religion.

The present publication is the first, I believe, that has been attempted on the plan which I have adopted, that is, an endeavour to portray the separate and progressive history of the Jews in the different countries in which they have made their homes, since their expulsion from the land with which they had been identified for something like thirty centuries. In, at all events, the majority of historical works on the Jews the student has to follow the particular Jews he wishes to study through all the mazes of their international wanderings, and finally to dig them out from a lengthy publication, as a schoolboy extracts a German verb from a seemingly interminable sentence. In these pages I have endeavoured to compile a narrative of a great part of what has occurred to the Jews of Africa in the eighteen and a half centuries which have elapsed since Titus did his best to erase the Jews as a political race from the face of the earth. I do not claim to have given accounts of every country or former state in which Jews may have resided to a greater or less extent, within the

Author's Introduction

limits of the period and continent laid down, but I have, I believe, dealt with all centres of importance in which they have been domiciled in any appreciable numbers in the continent in question. Much of the information contained in this volume is probably unknown to the average educated Jew, to say nothing of the average Gentile. Probably not one Jew in fifty thousand ever heard of the Jewish kings of Abyssinia or the Yemen or of many of the other romantic and perhaps somewhat legendary heroes whom Israel has mustered since the beginning of the Christian era. The ghettos, ancient and modern, know little of the Gideons of Semen, of Dhu Nuwas of the Yemen, or of Bar Cochba of Palestine. Few of them—at all events of late years—have heard of Sabbathai Zevi, of David Alroy, or of the other great Jews who did their best in the early centuries and in far distant climes to help their brethren.

This work, as I present it, must be regarded as a basis for future augmentation and elaboration by other and abler hands. Scholars possessing deeper knowledge, students trained to keener research, linguists with advantages that I do not possess, and historians with instinctive powers of selection, could produce on these lines a history of the Jews which might have weighty powers of benefit towards the solution of what is known as "the Jewish Question".

S. M.

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THE JEWS OF AFRICA

Especially in the Sixteenth and
Seventeenth Centuries

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY SKETCH

THE History of the Jews of Africa, more especially during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is necessarily limited to the northern portion of the continent. There may possibly have been, from time to time, small colonies or groups of traders on the eastern coast, and stray travellers, merchants, or miners in Monomotapa, and elsewhere before or after the destruction of the Jewish state, but at the period to which this account is mainly confined, no other important settlements existed than those recorded, with the one exception of that of the Marranos in the Canary Islands,¹ which, dating from the first quarter of the seventeenth century, appears to have dwindled and disappeared about the time of the readmission of the Jews to England, by which

¹ See *Crypto Jews in the Canaries*, by Lucien Wolf. London. *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society*, 1915.

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event its fortunes were closely affected. The countries dealt with in this work are,—in geographical progression from East to West,—Abyssinia (including Ethiopia), Egypt, Tripoli, Tunis, Algiers, and Morocco.

Egypt may be regarded as the cradle of the Jewish race, and in all probability it has never been without a Hebrew or Jewish population since the days when Joseph and his brethren laid the foundations of the nation. In all the other countries of Northern Africa, the Jewish population has resulted from a later immigration, and in some cases, from successive waves of immigration. Much of the history of this colonisation has been lost in the lapse of time, and even in periods more nearly approximating to the Middle Ages, the records must be considered obscure, legendary, or doubtful when examined from the more rigid historical standpoint. In the course of the following narrative it has often been necessary to thread together data supplied by travellers, historians, and writers, whose own works have been merely compilations from the works of others, and the results achieved may be reasonably questioned by critics to whom documentary evidence in matters of history is almost a *sine quâ non*.

The story of the Jews of Samem as related in the Abyssinian section of this book is based on a number of sources, each of which has been regarded as fairly authoritative (although not necessarily exact), taken by

Introductory Sketch

itself. Nevertheless, the record in its cumulative character, presenting a narrative which is not generally known, will no doubt be questioned with regard to historical accuracy.

The miraculous account of Ben Smia's voyage to Algiers is a remarkable example of the intertwining of the legendary with the historical, part of the narrative being founded on documentary evidence believed to be still in existence.

Many of the countries of Northern Africa proved a haven of refuge to the harassed Jews of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The barbarities of Torquemada, the bitter results of the hatred of Luther, together with the savage greed of less distinguished oppressors who had not even the religious excuses of their bigoted coevals, drove the wandering Israelites nearer and nearer to the land of their origin. The Crescent granted them a qualified protection, a shelter denied them by the adherents of the Cross,—Catholics and Protestants alike. That this protection was granted them when they most needed it should never be forgotten by their modern co-religionists; Jews had few friends in those days; it would be ill for them to forget those who did them service in the day of their bitter need.

CHAPTER II

ABYSSINIA AND ETHIOPIA

The Advent of the Jews—Maqueda, Queen of Sheba—The First Menelik—The Gideons and Judiths of Samen—The Conquest of Abyssinia by Judith—The Fall of the Kingdom of Samen.

NO part of the long and chequered career of the Jewish nation is more shrouded in mystery, and more romantic in legend, than the story of the advent and establishment of the Israelites in the mystic land known in mediæval times as the territory of Prester John. It is a difficult task to compile from legend, tradition, and such scanty documents as exist the conjectured history of the Falashas, those dark-visaged Hebrews, whose ancestors were distributed throughout the great and distant regions which were nominally or actually under the authority of the rulers of Abyssinia and Ethiopia. As far, however, as can be surmised from such sources as are available, an independent Jewish Kingdom long existed within the confines of what was known as the Ethiopian Empire. Its territory—which varied in extent from time to time—was considerably greater

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than that embraced by the ancient kingdoms of Judah and Israel, and its existence, in all probability, was of a longer duration. The great mystery, which shrouded the greater part of Africa down to times still but little distant, would account for the fact that so little was known of this Jewish Kingdom, if, indeed, a kingdom actually existed, and, as a matter of fact, very little that is absolutely authentic, is known about it to-day even by those few people who have made a very close study of the history of the ancient Empire of Ethiopia and of the Kingdom of Abyssinia.

A well-known authority states,¹ that "there were always Jews in Ethiopia from the beginning", and this statement may be conjecturally justified by the proximity of Abyssinia and Ethiopia and their dependencies to the ancient homes of the Israelites in Egypt and Palestine. There are, however, several theories respecting the origin of the Jews in Abyssinia and Ethiopia, and Falashas and Abyssinians alike have always believed, and still believe, in the Judaic origin of their individual races, while many authorities are of opinion that three separate migrations of Jews into Ethiopia actually took place. The three theories chronologically arranged are as follows :—

(1) That Menelik, son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, who had received his education in

¹ Tellez, *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia*.

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Palestine, went back to Abyssinia on the establishment of the Ethiopic Empire by his mother, bringing with him a large number of Jews, at a day somewhat anterior to that on which he ascended the Abyssinian throne (986 B.C.).

(2) That Sargon, or Sennacherib, the successor of Shalmaneser III, King of Assyria, having continued the war commenced by his predecessor, conquered the Kingdom of Israel, and brought the captive Jews and their King Hosea to his country (circa 722 B.C.), and from thence they eventually found their way into Abyssinia and Ethiopia.¹

(3) That after the destruction of Jerusalem by Vespasian in 70 A.D., large numbers of Jews fled or drifted into Ethiopia, Abyssinia, and the neighbouring territories.

Some writers state that the descendants of the earlier emigrants who were supposed to have accompanied Menelik, treated the later arrivals as strangers, and that the latter practised rites and observed festivals unknown to the earlier colonists, who, for example, had never heard of the minor festivals of Hanucah or Purim, or of the Talmuds. If these statements are accepted they provide some justification for the acceptance of the first theory with reference to their

¹ See Sayce, *The Ancient Empires of the East*, p. 128. Shalmaneser III died during the siege of Samaria, 722 B.C.

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origin. How far the account of the establishment of the Empire of Ethiopia by the Queen of Sheba may be considered as historical, it is probably useless to discuss to-day. The Bible chronicles her visit to King Solomon and all Abyssinian and Falashan traditions agree as to its authenticity and affirm that Menelik, her son (and son of King Solomon), succeeded her on the throne, while a list has been preserved of the Kings of "the Race of Solomon, descended from the Queen of Saba".¹

Indeed, it has been maintained that it is quite possible that the Queen of Sheba and her people professed the Jewish Religion even before the reign of King Solomon, although Abyssinian annals state that the Queen was formerly a pagan, but was converted to Judaism in Jerusalem. She appears to have been a woman of learning, resource, and energy, and after she had established the Empire of Ethiopia, she settled the succession "in the family of Solomon", enacting that *after her* "no woman should be capable of wearing the crown or being queen, but that it should descend to the heir male, however distant". In all probability, most of her own people, the Sabeans, as well as a large number of the inhabitants of Abyssinia adopted the tenets of Judaism, probably soon after her visit to King Solomon at Jerusalem, an event which

¹ See Note I, p. 30.

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must have taken place somewhere about one thousand years before the beginning of the Christian era.¹

The Queen of Sheba² died, apparently, about the year 986 B.C., and Menelik, her son, succeeded her in due course. According to Abyssinian tradition, the Queen had sent her son to the Jewish King in order that his education should be completed, and "Solomon did not neglect his charge". It was believed that Menelik was duly "anointed and crowned king of Ethiopia, in the temple of Jerusalem, and at his inauguration took the name of David". He returned to Azab, or Sheba, bringing with him a colony of Jews, among whom were doctors of law or Judges, and priests. "All Abyssinia was thereupon converted, and the government of the church and state modelled according to what was then in use at Jerusalem".³ Menelik, or David I, reigned four years, but although a list of his successors has been compiled, and the dates of their accessions computed, there are so many discrepancies in the Abyssinian annals that it is useless to place any reliance on their historical value. There appears, however, to be no absolute reason to doubt the tradition that the general religion of the country

¹ Theodore Bent, in *The Sacred City of the Ethiopians*, expresses his disbelief in the existence of Judaism in Abyssinia, until centuries after the birth of Christ.

² Sheba is also "written Saba, Azab, or Azaba; all signifying South." See Bruce's *Travels*, vol. ii, p. 395.

³ *Ibid.*

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continued to be that of Judaism, till the joint reign of the Kings Abreha and Atzbeha, when a large proportion of the inhabitants were converted to Christianity under the missionary influence and efforts of Frumentius, first Bishop of Abyssinia (circa 330 A.D.). It is alleged, however, that a considerable portion of the population adhered to the older creed and resented the apostasy of those who had joined the ranks of the Christians. The Jewish minority is represented to have been determined, powerful and enthusiastic for their faith, and there can be little doubt that the contest between the adherents of the two religions was long and bitter. The Jews eventually resolved to have a monarch of their own, choosing Phineas, "one of the Royal line of Solomon . . . a prince of the House of Judah" ¹ It has more than once been suggested, that the chosen leader was no other than Dhu Nuwas, the Jewish King of Yemen.² It must be remembered, however, that presumably nearly two hundred years had elapsed between the establishment of Christianity in Abyssinia, and the defeat of Dhu Nuwas by the armies of Caleb, the Abyssinian King. It is hardly probable that the Jews would have waited two centuries before choosing their king, and although the uncertainties respecting the dates of these events might make it possible that

¹ Bruce's *Travels*, vol. ii, p. 408.
Israeliten.

² Jost. *Geschichte der*

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the two kings were identical, it seems more feasible to conjecture that there was an earlier Phineas, whom the Jews appointed in the days of Abreha and Atzbeha, while Dhu Nuwas, coming on the scene in the sixth century, was also known to the Abyssinians under the name of Phineas. In any case, it seems probable that Halévy's theory,¹ that some of the Falashas are descended from former subjects of Dhu Nuwas, is substantially correct, as whether the King escaped or not, there seems no reason to doubt that part of his army fled to the mountainous regions of Samen and Dembea after their defeat by the Abyssinian King Caleb.

If the legend of the Falashas that Phineas was their first King, be accepted, and it is further presumed that he took possession of his territories soon after the establishment of Christianity in Abyssinia, then the Kingdom which he is supposed to have founded may be computed to have had an existence of something like 1,300 years. His accession to power was probably characterized by the establishment of his state as a kind of Zion, which attracted his co-religionists from Abyssinia and other Ethiopic Dominions, from north and south Yemen, and even more distant countries, and possibly a large number of Jews dispersed throughout the Ethiopian Empire secretly

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. v, p. 329.

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recognized the authority of the Jewish Kings who ruled over the three provinces of Samen, Dembea, and Wagara, while they ostensibly obeyed the ruler of the district in which they resided. Jost evidently conjectures that for a considerable time,¹ the Falashas were in occupation of the whole of the territory of the three provinces down to, and including, the coast, but that at a later period, they retired from the maritime districts towards Dembea and Samen. Very little, however, can be ascertained respecting the history or the condition of the Jewish Kingdom for many centuries, but it seems probable that as Christianity gathered strength in the Ethiopian Empire, the Jews concentrated more and more in the mountainous regions of Samen and the surrounding territories dominated by its rugged fortresses. It would appear that, generally speaking, the kings and queens of the country, on their accession to the throne, assumed the royal titles of Gideon, and Judith, respectively, in addition to their other names. From time to time, this Jewish kingdom was at war with Abyssinia, but, at all events after the seventh century, the struggles sprang from ambitions or political motives and do not seem to have been precipitated by religious animosities.

In the last quarter of the tenth century, the whole of

¹ *Geschichte der Israeliten*, vol. viii, p. 167.

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the Ethiopian Empire was stirred by occurrences which left their impress on the kingdom of Abyssinia for a period of three or four hundred years. At this time, the reigning King Gideon of Samen, and his Queen Judith, had a daughter who also bore the name of Judith, and was married to the Governor of Bugna, a province in the neighbourhood of Lasta, both of which territories had a considerable Jewish population. Judith,¹ the king's daughter, was a woman of great beauty, with an overpowering weakness for intrigue and an almost unrestricted ambition. She had immense influence in Samen and the adjoining territories, and her following was so considerable and so powerful, that she resolved to attempt the subversion of the Christian religion in Abyssinia, together with the line of King Solomon, whose kings were supporters of the new faith. Circumstances favoured her schemes; the Christian King of Abyssinia, Aizor, died suddenly and unexpectedly, and his son was a mere infant. Hereupon, Judith determined to endeavour by a bold and rapid stroke to capture the Abyssinian throne, and establish her religion throughout the territories of Abyssinia and Ethiopia.² By a regulation established by the Queen of Sheba, and thenceforth perpetually

¹ Judith, whom Salt calls Gudit, was also known as Esther, Essat, Assaat, and Saat (*i.e.*, fire) in the Amharic tongue, and, in addition, as "Tredda Gabez," or "Terdae-Gobaz." ² Bruce's *Travels*, vol. ii, p. 452.

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observed, the heirs to the Abyssinian throne and the Princes of the Ruling Dynasty were confined to, or housed on, Dano, an almost inaccessible mountain in the province of Tigré. Judith gathered together an adequate force, seized the Rock, and slew all the princes and nobility there to the number of about four hundred souls. The infant King, Del Naad, was rescued by some of the nobles and taken to the Kingdom of Sceiva, or Shoa, which was apparently never conquered by Judith or her successors. The escape of the King, however, did not prove any obstacle to Judith's plans, and she took possession of Tigré and finally of the whole of the country with the exception of Shoa, and placed herself on the throne, in defiance of the Salic law instituted by Maqueda, the Queen of Sheba of Solomon's time.

Like all historical traditions of the Abyssinians, the date of these occurrences—if some of them occurred at all—is the subject of much discrepancy. Jost says they took place in the seventh century; Ludolf¹ dates them about 900 years after Christ; Salt gives the date as 925 A.D.; Bruce says it was in the year 960; while Halévy and other writers throw doubt on the authenticity of the entire story.² The royal line founded by Queen Judith reigned over Abyssinia for three hundred

¹ *Nouvelle Histoire d'Abissinie ou d'Ethiopie.*
Encyclopædia, vol. v, p. 329.

² *Jewish*

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years, or according to Ludolf, for still another century. Being usurpers, their history was not preserved in the Abyssinian annals, but one of the Kings—Prince Lalibala—seems to have been a ruler of some importance. Bruce says that he “was a saint”, and Ludolf avers that he built twenty-four magnificent Temples. It is supposed, however, that the court and country had reverted to Christianity before Lalibala’s accession to the throne, and Bruce states that these edifices were the work of Christian fugitives from Egypt and Arabia, many of the churches having been hewn out of the solid rock. According to Abyssinian authorities the whole period occupied by Judith’s successors “was one scene of murder, violence, and oppression”, but so little information of historical value has been preserved, that it is useless to conjecture what really occurred within these three or four centuries.

About the year 1255 A.D., King Icon-Amlac of Shoa, a descendant of the line of King Solomon, recovered the Kingdom of Abyssinia, mainly through the assistance and influence of a monk named Abuna Tecla Haimanout, and under his successors, “the Jewish Kings of Samen were weakened by successive conquests and treachery. Their subjects were reduced to a handful by the zeal of the monks and the allurements of a superior protection. The remainder were forced

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into the mountains . . . governed by tradition in matters of faith ; for all their written records have perished ”.¹ Nevertheless, according to tradition, Samen and the adjoining provinces were still under the domination of princes of Jewish Race, and despite occasional wars, insurrections, and revolts, no tribute appears to have been paid by them to the Kings of Abyssinia, and their independence was maintained for several centuries. Basnage relates that Oviedo, whom Pope Julius III made Patriarch of Ethiopia, with hopes to re-unite this Kingdom to his See, wrote (A.D. 1557) “ that the Jews possess’d great inaccessible Mountains ; that they had dispossess’d the Christian of many lands which they were Masters of, and that the Kings of Ethiopia could not subdue them, because they have but small forces, and it is very difficult to penetrate into the Fastnesses of their Rocks ”. Indeed, the old Chronicler was greatly concerned at the continued existence of the Jewish State. The prophecy of the Patriarch Jacob would seem to have troubled this somewhat biased historian. When he read in the Book of Genesis that “ the sceptre shall not depart from Judah, or a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come ”, his mind appears to have dwelt on the as yet unconquered Jewish Kings of Samen with considerable uneasiness. He evidently considered he

¹ Bruce's *Travels*, vol. ii, p. 492.

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ought to reassure his readers, and comments as follows :—

“ Such as fear lest this little Corner of a Kingdom or rather this retreat into Rocks or Mountains may weaken our interpretation of Jacob’s prophecy, and furnish the Jewish Doctors with a Pretence, that the Sceptre of Judah is not broken, are too weak and timorous. . . . For this is not the Kingdom of Judah which Jacob promised to his Posterity, and it would be ridiculous to say, that some Jews conceal’d in inaccessible mountains keep up that Succession of Princes and Lawgivers that were to make the Nation flourish in the Holy Land ”.¹

But whatever Basnage may have thought or have written at the end of the seventeenth century, the position was differently regarded a century earlier. Sanuto, the famous geographer of that period, whose African Atlas and Geography was published in 1588, shows a Jewish State distinctly marked as “ Judaeorum Terra ”, in Tabula X of his African Maps, the country extending some distance south of the Equator, and surrounded by mountains,—a very considerable territory. John Pory, the English Translator of *The History and Description of Africa*, by Leo Africanus, writing at the commencement of the seventeenth century, contributed a chapter on “ The Religions of

¹ *History of the Jews.*

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Africa", in which he remarks: "At this day also the Abassins affirme, that upon Nilus towards the West there inhabiteth a most populous nation of the Jewish stock under a mighte K(ing). And some of our moderne Cosmographers set downe a province in those quarters which they call, the Land of the Hebrewes, placed as it were under the equinoctiall, in certaine unknowne mountaines, between the confines of Abassia, and Congo. And likewise on the north part of the Kingdom of Goiame, and the southerly quarter of the Kingdome of Gorhan there are certaine mountaines, peopled with Jewes, who there maintaine themselves free, and absolute, through the inaccessible situations of the same".¹ Pory would thus appear to have been of the opinion that there was a Jewish state in the region indicated by Sanuto, as well as other territories under Jewish rule in the vicinity of the Abyssinian Kingdom. Sanuto's references to the "terra de' Giudei" are solely of a geographical character, and the position in which he locates the "Country of the Jews" on the "African Tabula X" is south-west, and near the Equator. He makes it adjoin the ancient Kingdom of Benin, which is placed to the west of the Jewish territory on his map.²

Some thirty years before Sanuto's map was pub-

¹ *A Geographical History of Africa*. Leo Africanus: Pory's Translation. ² *Geografia di M. Livio Sanuto*. Venice, 1588.

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lished, Menas, King of Abyssinia, otherwise known as Adamis Segued, attacked Radaet (or Rade'et), the Falasha King of Samen, but the Abyssinian Monarch was unsuccessful and had to retire. The war was continued by his successor Melec Segued, or Sartsa Denghel, who defeated the Moors and the Falashas, the latter surrendering their King Radaet, who was banished by the Abyssinian monarch. However, the Jewish Kingdom was still neither occupied nor conquered, and another King, named Caliph, being appointed, the war continued, until finally Melec Segued succeeded in defeating the Falasha ruler. The Jews were, however, roused to further effort by the destruction of their cattle and crops, and they mustered in considerable numbers under a new king, named Geshen, but were again defeated on the Plain of Wegara, on the 19th of January, 1594, when four thousand Jewish warriors, including their brave general and leader, Geshen, were slain. After this, Melec Segued marched through the adjacent territories where, although there were many Jewish strongholds, no further resistance was encountered. Later, however, yet another Gideon, a brother of the dead warrior Geshen, was raised to the throne, as King of the Falashas.

In the year 1615, an adventurer named Amdo claimed the throne of Abyssinia, held at that time by

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Susneus or Soscinius. Amdo resided in, or near, Samen, and was taken prisoner by Gideon, but later, this King helped him in his designs, and assisted him to raise an army. Susneus thereupon took the field against the Jewish chief, stormed his principal fortresses, and finally defeated Gideon's army, killing his principal general. In these circumstances, Gideon, fearing "the extirpation of his whole nation", surrendered the rebel Amdo, and made peace with Susneus. In the year 1617, without assigning any reason for the treacherous act, Susneus sent armed forces to massacre all the Jews wherever they could be found, and in this general holocaust, Gideon the King perished, and with him the Jewish Kingdom of Samen, which is supposed to have existed for thirteen hundred years. This Gideon "was a man of great reputation, not only among his subjects, but throughout all Abyssinia, reputed also immensely rich". His treasures, supposed to be concealed in the mountains, were the objects of search by the Abyssinians as late as the period at which Bruce wrote.¹

The Fall of the Jewish Kingdom was followed by the ostensible apostasy of the Falashas in Samen and Dembea, who had to choose between the renunciation of their religion, and death. Susneus "unwisely imagined that he had extinguished, by one blow, the

¹ See Bruce's *Travels*, vol. iii, p. 308.

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religion which was that of his country long before Christianity, by the unwarrantable butchery of a number of people whom he had surprised living in security under the assurance of peace", but he, nevertheless, failed in his attempt to destroy the Jewish People, as the survivors merely dispersed to adjoining territories, and in all probability, lived as secret Jews after accepting the rite of baptism which they had been forced to endure. Nevertheless, with this treacherous massacre of the Falashas, the life of the Jewish Kingdom terminated, and no adequate foundation can be found for the conjecture that the Falashas had a separate political existence until the end of the eighteenth century. Minor chiefs and leaders of the remnant of the Jewish race may have been permitted, and perhaps even encouraged, under the newly-appointed Governors of Samen, but the people were vassals, and paid tribute, and no Gideons or Judiths inspired the enthusiasm of the broken and shattered nation of Falashas. In modern times the race still exists, scattered over the provinces of Abyssinia, and much interest has been taken in its survival by modern travellers and writers.

CHAPTER III

ABYSSINIA AND ETHIOPIA (*continued*)

The Falashas on the Sea Coast—The Withdrawal to the Interior—The Pottery Industry—The Smiths and the Weavers—The Modern Falashas—Stern's Experiences.

IF Jost's theory is correct, and the Falashas, at one period, occupied some of the territory on the eastern coast of the Red Sea, it seems very extraordinary that more knowledge of them than exists did not come to light in the course of so many centuries, during which travellers were constantly sailing over that long, narrow, and almost land-locked piece of water. According to this author, the actual territory occupied is unknown, and of the language of the inhabitants we have also no knowledge. The exodus from the maritime districts must, moreover, have entirely changed the habits and industries of the race. While on the coast, they had doubtless engaged in over-sea commerce with neighbouring countries, a traffic which may have commenced in the days of Solomon, King of Israel, and Hiram, King of Tyre, but when they moved inland, one of their principal occupations was "the manufacture of Tiles, and other

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coverings for roofs, as well as earthen vessels, and pottery of all descriptions, in the making of which they had arrived at considerable excellence".¹ The existence of this employment in the country of the Falashas, lends colour to the theory that some of them were descended from Yemenite fugitives who had been similarly occupied in their own country. In support of this it may be mentioned that the clay in both Samen and Dembea is very suitable for this purpose. As a matter of fact, Jost does not seem to doubt that Phineas of Abyssinia, and Dhu Nuwas of Yemen, were one and the same person, and that when the latter was defeated, many of his subjects "chose the shorter route to Ethiopia, where they found brethren, who enjoyed a certain amount of power, whose language and customs assimilated with their own, and above all, with whom they had had commercial intercourse for many centuries past".² Nevertheless, this author expresses his amazement "that Jewish travellers from the maritime countries of the Mediterranean never thought of visiting their independent brothers in Africa", and that "even after news of them had spread, still no Jew had the curiosity to see anything of them with his own eyes". Only the vaguest references are made to the Falashas by Jewish writers, and nothing of any special value can be obtained from

¹ Jost. *Geschichte der Israeliten*. ² *Ibid*.

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these sources. That most extraordinary searcher after the ten tribes, Moses Edrehi, in his quaint and garbled *Book of Miracles*, quotes from another book which he calls *Emry Bena*, which speaks of the "Mountains of the Moon ; and upon these mountains there are multitudes of Jews even more than one million, and they pay taxes to the King of Ethiopia. And the country they inhabit is called *Pretty Joaney*".¹

As frequently occurs, we have to turn to the compilers of the records of the Jesuit Missions for information respecting the social conditions of the Falashas during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Balthazar Tellez, whose account of Ethiopia was brought down to the year 1654, maintains that after the Jews were dispersed by Susneus many of them resettled in Dembea, where they occupied themselves in "weaving, or else by making of Darts, Plows, or other such like Necessaries, being great Smiths". He also speaks of many Jews "free from any Subjection to the Empire" of Abyssinia, who lived in territories "betwixt the Emperor's Dominions and the Cafres dwelling near the River Nile". The Old Jesuit father saw some kind of religious justice in the constant dispersions of the Israelites and remarked: "God so ordering, that they should have no settled Dwelling on the Earth, who would not receive the King of

¹ *Historical Account of the Ten Tribes.*

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Heaven". He asserted that the Jews "have still Hebrew Bibles", but maintained that they sang "the Psalms very scurvily in their Synagogues".¹

It is interesting to note that the English geographer Ogilby, who closely follows the Dutch author Dapper, remarks in his folio work on Africa, published in the year 1670, that the Abyssinians called the kingdom of Samen "*Xionuche*", a name that seems curiously reminiscent of a Palestinian connexion. He maintains that it is "a country but little known and less conversed with; and under the Dominion of the Abessines".

Ludolphus does not throw much fresh light on the state of Samen in the seventeenth century, and much of his information appears to have been derived from the work of Balthazar Tellez. He rather criticizes the Jesuit fathers Piaz, D'Almeyda, and Mendez, the pioneer Catholic missionaries in Abyssinia, whose accounts of their travels and experiences were compiled and edited by Tellez. He complains that they "never took care to enquire when, or upon what occasion, the Jews came first into Ethiopia? . . . What sacred books they use, whether with points, or without points? Whether they have any Traditions concerning their own, or Nation of the Habessines? Which to know, would certainly be most grateful to many Learned Men; in regard it seems very probable,

¹ *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia.*

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that there may be some Ancient Books among them, since they have liv'd so long and so securely in such inaccessible holds".¹

Ludolphus further remarks that the Jews obtained their livelihood by carpentry and weaving. Basnage adds to these occupations those of the manufacture of woollen fabrics and iron work. Jost and others mention their pottery works ; and Bruce mentions the crops and cattle raised by the Jews at the end of the sixteenth century, and says that they were "a frugal and economical people". But what is especially noteworthy and significant, is that one hears of neither traders nor usurers. Here in a country densely populated by Jews in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and under their own government, they appear to have confined themselves, when at peace, to artizan occupations and farming and agricultural pursuits, thus showing that under their own rulers, and under suitable conditions, their occupations differed widely from those in which they engage in other parts of the world, under other conditions,—pursuits which have been a source of reproach to them, as undeserved as it has been unwarranted.

Basnage states that after the defeats under Susneus, the Jews dispersed all over the Kingdom of Abyssinia, "in effect, some of 'em are Weavers, and others Smiths.

¹ *A New History of Ethiopia.*

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As the Abyssines hate this trade, they leave it to the Jews who undertake to furnish them with all warlike Instruments. They have there their Synagogues, and Publick Worship, in which they use the Talmudic Hebrew, tho' they have not receiv'd that collection of Traditions. Lastly, great numbers follow the Court of the King of the Abessines. An Arabian who had travell'd in that country at the end of the last century (seventeenth) assured Mr Ludolf that sixty thousand of 'em were at Court. They correspond with the Christians, and live familiarly with 'em in that Country".¹

Notwithstanding the dispersion of the Falashas, many of them still live together in villages in various parts of Abyssinia, as well as in the larger towns. Writing early in the nineteenth century, Gobat, one of the emissaries of the Church Missionary Society, remarks that "the Falashas live so retired, and are so separated from the Christians, that the latter know scarcely anything either of their doctrines or of their manners. They live chiefly in the neighbourhood of Gondar and Shelga, and to the north-west of the lake Tsana. . . . They have, on the whole, the same superstitions as the Christians: they are only a little modified after a Jewish fashion. I have never observed that they took the least interest in the idea of the

¹ *History of the Jews.*

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Messiah. . . . They have a dialect among themselves, which has no similarity either with the Hebrew or with the Ethiopic, but all of them, except some females, speak Amharic. I have seen but one book in the Falasha dialect written in the Ethiopic character : They told me that it was a book of prayers. . . . They are much more laborious than the other Abyssinians : the building of all the houses of Gondar is their work. . . . All of them are considered as boudas or sorcerers, as also are the artificers in iron and many others. The Falashas, after having spoken with Christians, never enter their own houses without first washing their bodies and changing their dress. . . . Their intercourse with the Mohammedans is a little more free than with the Christians. They never carry arms either for attack or defence. They maintain their own poor, and will not suffer them to beg".¹

A far more detailed and interesting account of the Falashas is afforded by Henry A. Stern, who was sent as a missionary to them some thirty years after Gobat visited the country. A Jew by birth, Stern was in a better position to judge of many characteristics and customs of the Falashas than other travellers or missionaries, and despite his conversion to Christianity, he was more sympathetic towards their conditions, and more tolerant of their superstitions. He remarks

¹ *A Three Years' Residence in Abyssinia.*

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that after the fall of their last king, " the Falashas were driven from their rocky homes, and forced to seek a refuge in the midst of their enemies, the detested Amharas. The provinces where they at present reside are Dembea, Quara, Wogera, Tschelga, and Godjam, where their settlements are strikingly distinguished from the Christian villages by the red earthen pot on the apex of their *mesquid*, or place of worship, which towers from the centre of the thatched huts by which it is invariably environed". The Falashas pride themselves on the purity of their race, and inter-marriages with other tribes are strictly forbidden. Very early marriages are discouraged, and polygamy is not allowed, but their daughters and wives are not shut up in their houses, and enjoy immunity from all slavish restraint. The Falashas are faithful to the law of Moses " as far as their limited knowledge of the Scriptures extends". They still offer sacrifices, but these observances are not carried out in the presence of strangers. The laws of purification are strictly adhered to, and " every Falasha settlement has a hut at its outskirts, and there the unclean and impure must take refuge during the prescribed number of days". It is stated that the Jewish feasts are regularly observed, " though with less rigour than by the Jews in other parts of the world. Passover . . . is solemnized by offering the appointed sacrifice, and by the substitution

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of unleavened bread. On the Feast of Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles, the people bring their offerings to the *mesquids*, and also join in appropriate commemorative prayers, but beyond this, and abstinence from agricultural pursuits, they neither blow the horn, erect booths, nor practise the other ancient ceremonies of the Synagogue''. The Sabbath is kept quite strictly, the preparations for it commencing on Fridays at noon. Services are held on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings, and many of the prayers are not to be found in other Jewish rituals. Stern alludes to the freedom of the race "from many of the burdens, which pharisaical pride and arrogance imposed on the superstitious credulity of other Jews. Broad phylacteries and the garments of fringes are utterly unknown among them", and they appear to have been uninfluenced by Rabbinic teaching, having "removed from their native land long before the final dispersion of their race". It is noteworthy that Stern found them "exemplary in their morals, cleanly in their habits, and devout in their belief". It is stated that they occupy themselves as smiths, potters, and weavers, and repudiate commerce as incompatible with the Mosaic Code. "It is quite a disappointment not to find a merchant among a quarter of a million of people, the lineal descendants of those who are supposed to

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have acquired a taste for traffic and riches, on the very eve of their emancipation from Egyptian servitude ”.

During the half a century which has elapsed since Stern visited the country, many travellers have written accounts of Abyssinia, and of the Falashas. The most recent work on the subject is by Dr. Jacques Faïtlovitch, who went to Abyssinia, for the second time, solely to acquire information respecting his co-religionists in the dominions of the Negus Menelik II.¹

NOTE

I. Writing at the close of the first half of the nineteenth century, Walter Chichele Plowden, the British Consul in Abyssinia, observes that certain Abyssinian “ traditions state that when Solomon commenced his reign in Judæa, Axum was the seat of a serpent-king, of whose dimensions and habits many uninteresting fables are related ; amongst the rest (as usual in similar stories that I need not recall to the educated reader), a virgin was daily provided for his expensive appetite. Saba, a virgin of high birth and pure spirit, by her prayers and tears, obtained the favour of heaven, and some celestial warrior in earthly form slew the dragon, and delivered the damsel ; on her foot, however, the saliva of the serpent had fallen, and caused incurable ulcers and lameness. Having been by universal

¹ See his *Quer durch Abessinien*.

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acclaim appointed queen of the nation (Queen of Sheba ?), she crossed the seas to seek for cure at the hands of the wise and far-famed Solomon, and after various adventures returned to Abyssinia pregnant with a son by that monarch. It is said that on her departure Solomon gave her a golden staff, as the proof his son was to bring to him if the child should be a male, and a diamond ring to be presented if a daughter. In due time she bore a son, who was named Menelek. At the age of sixteen, having previously informed his father of her intention by letter, she sent him to Jerusalem with the golden staff. Aware of the searching mind of Solomon, and being herself quick-witted, she apprehended that the pledge might be mistrusted, and in her final instructions she bid her son beware of too hastily bestowing it on the person he might find seated on his father's throne, but first to examine his own countenance in a mirror, and search amid the throng of courtiers for a maturer resemblance of himself. Following this advice, he presented the staff to his father, whom he detected seated on the ground in humble attire, while another in gorgeous robes filled his usual seat. Thereupon Solomon acknowledged him as his son in wisdom as in blood ; and, after keeping him some years, sent him to govern Ethiopia, accompanied by the eldest sons of many Jews of rank and consideration. From Menelek are said to descend the

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Kings of Gondar to this day, and from the Jews the twelve judges, the keepers of the sacred books, and other officers that hold high rank in the empire.

“Two things are certain—that at a far later period, six sovereigns of pure Jewish race and faith reigned at Gondar, and that to this day numerous Jews are found throughout Abyssinia. I think it also highly probable, that (at whatever epoch it may be placed), the whole of Abyssinia was of the Jewish persuasion previous to its conversion; as even those who have adopted the Christian creed still retain, as will be seen, numerous Jewish forms and observances. Their conversion to Christianity occurred about three centuries after Christ; it appears to have been the work of an Egyptian monk. . . .”¹

¹ *Travels in Abyssinia.*

CHAPTER IV

EGYPT

The Earliest Jewish Inhabitants—The Exodus—The Ptolemies
--Jewish Government Officials--The Cairo Purim--Sabbathai
Zevi—Raphael Joseph the Tshlebi—A "Blood Accu-
sation."

THE foundation of the Kingdom of Egypt is almost lost in antiquity. One of the first—if not indeed the first—of countries to emerge from barbarism to political civilization, it is said to have been ruled by Princes even before King Menes (sometimes considered the earliest historical king) directed its destinies at a period calculated to be something like 3,500 years before the beginning of the Christian Era. Some 1,600 years later, the Patriarch Abraham flourished; about 150 years still later the Jews were in slavery in Egypt, and the Egyptian Kingdom was already nearly two thousand years old when the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea. In all probability, the Exodus was by no means universal, and a few laggards and shirkers stayed behind amid the alluring "fleshpots of Egypt", or slipped back to their old haunts during the forty years' wanderings in the

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desert. Possibly others returned during the days of the Judges, or in the more exciting times of the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel, when perhaps a maritime traffic had developed between Palestine and Egypt, and there were probably fair-sized colonies of Jewish inhabitants at Cairo and other North Egyptian towns when the destruction of Palestine as a state dispersed the Jews in so many directions especially in Asia and Africa. Those who went to Egypt from time to time had no doubt to undergo many fluctuations of fate, but they appear to have been allowed to remain permanently in the country and shared in its vicissitudes of fortune throughout its many changes of government and domination. When the mighty empires conquered by Alexander the Great were divided among his generals, Syria, Judea, and Palestine were apportioned to Laomedon, who, however, was soon dispossessed by Ptolemy I, formerly satrap, and afterwards King of Egypt (322-285 B.C.). Ancient historians state that Ptolemy visited Jerusalem circa 320 B.C., "pretending that he wished to sacrifice, and seized it on a Sabbath, a day on which the Jews did not fight". The Egyptian monarch "is said to have taken many captives from Jerusalem, and from the rest of Judea, as well as from Samaria, and to have settled them in Egypt", and Josephus reports that "thereafter many Jews went voluntarily to Egypt to

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live, partly on account of the excellence of the land, and partly on account of the kind treatment accorded them by Ptolemy ". It is maintained that this king made good use of the Jews for military purposes, and organized the Jewish population of Egypt, while granting the Jews of Alexandria equal rights with the Macedonians.¹

Palestine remained an Egyptian province until 198 B.C., and the earlier Ptolemies befriended the Jews both in Egypt and in her dependancies. The Jews of Alexandria had formed an important portion of the inhabitants of the town from its foundation by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C., and Ptolemy I granted them a separate section of the city, "so that they might not be hindered in the observance of their laws by continual contact with the pagan population ". The Jews, however, were not confined to this quarter, and their dwellings and synagogues were distributed all over the city. Nor were their rights disputed when the Romans took possession of Egypt, and the Emperor Augustus confirmed and his successor maintained them. As a matter of fact the Alexandrian Jews "not only enjoyed civil rights . . . but in public life occupied a more influential position than anywhere else in the ancient world ". In the year 38 A.D., a persecution of the Jews in Alexandria took place under

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. x, p. 262.

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the auspices of the Roman Governor Flaccus, and in the course of the next century, revolts of the Jewish inhabitants against their Roman oppressors were frequent.

Little is known regarding the position of the Jews in Egypt during the Arab invasion and occupation of the country, nor of their fortunes under the various dynasties of Caliphs which ruled the land for so many hundreds of years. In the twelfth century, certain renowned Jewish scholars and travellers went to Egypt, among whom were the celebrated poet Judah ha-Levi, the great Jewish scholar, Maimonides, and that famous Jewish traveller, Benjamin of Tudela. The last-named gave a detailed account of the more important Jewish communities in Egypt, from which it appears certain that the Jewish population of Alexandria had been much reduced in number since the time of the Roman occupation. During the last three centuries of Arab or Saracen domination, the Jews on the whole led a quiet existence, although at times a despot's persecution or a fanatical riot resulted in much trouble and misfortune. The sixteenth century, however, was destined to see the last of the Mameluke rule over Egypt, for early in the year 1517, the Turkish Sultan Selim I, defeated the last Bey of the Mamelukes, and took possession of the country.

Selim entirely altered the system under which the

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Jews had been governed in Egypt. For many hundreds of years—under the rule of the Caliphs—the Jews had been under the authority of an official of their own race, appointed by the head of the state, and known under the title of Nagid. At the time of Selim's conquest of Egypt, the Nagid was a certain Isaac Cohen Sholal, who had enacted many important regulations for Jerusalem during his term of office. When Selim abolished the post, Sholal took up his residence in the Holy City, and the Turkish Sultan made all the Jewish communities independent of one another, appointing David ibn Abi Zimra at the head of the Jews of Cairo, while Abraham De Castro was selected to fill the post of "master of the mint". Later, this latter office appears to have been included in the duties of the *Zaraf Bassa* or *Bashi*, who nearly always was a Jew, while another Jewish official (who was often the Chief Rabbi), was named the "Tshlebi" or "Chelebri". Solyman I, "the magnificent", who succeeded to the Turkish throne in 1520, three years later appointed Ahmed, or Achmed Pasha, to the post of viceroy of Egypt. The latter was a most ambitious soldier of fortune, and being disappointed in his desire to obtain the post of Grand Vizier, conceived the design of throwing off the Turkish yoke and recovering the independence of Egypt, over which he proposed to rule as supreme lord, instead of as the vassal of the Turkish

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Sultan. Abraham De Castro was still master of the mint, and Achmed, after taking some preliminary steps and many precautions, proposed to him that his (Achmed's) name should appear on the Egyptian coinage instead of that of the Sultan. De Castro feigned acquiescence, and, obtaining the viceregal order for the alteration, secretly set out for Constantinople, where he informed Solyman of Achmed's treacherous intentions.¹ In the meantime, Achmed, incensed by de Castro's action, but unable to avenge himself on the wary *Zaraf Bashi*, planned to destroy all his co-religionists in Cairo. He therefore imprisoned many of the leading Jews, and demanded from the others for their release a sum of money so enormous that the community was quite unable to raise the amount. He then threatened to pillage the Jewish quarter and put the whole of the inhabitants to death, if the sum were not paid. The money not being forthcoming on the appointed day, the Jewish quarter was looted in part, and death appeared to confront the inhabitants, when a rebellion, headed by one of the viziers named Mohamed Bey, broke out against Achmed. Achmed was wounded and escaped, but he was subsequently captured, thrown into prison, and beheaded. According to Basnage, "The Jews being delivered, made a great Entertainment, and called the

¹ See Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. iv, p. 395.

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Feast they celebrated in Memory of this event, *Nessim* ; because this word signifies a Miracle, and the Stake to which Achmed's head was fastened ". These events, which occurred in March 1524, gave rise to the establishment of a minor Jewish festival in Egypt, on the lines of the national feast of Purim. The feast was celebrated on the anniversary of the event, Adar 28th, and was known as the " Cairo Purim ", or " Purim al Mizriyim " (Purim in Egypt). A *Megillah*, or Hebrew Manuscript, was prepared which contained a narrative of Achmed's plot and its attendant circumstances, and of the conspirator's fate, and this account of the downfall of Achmed and the defeat of his devices, was read in the synagogues throughout Egypt every year.

Soon after the middle of the seventeenth century, the renowned pseudo-Messiah, Sabbathai Zevi, visited Cairo. At this period, the post of *Zaraf Bashi* was filled by Raphael Joseph,¹ who, according to Graetz, was " a man of great wealth, and open-handed benevolence, but of unspeakable credulity, and ineradicable propensity to mysticism and asceticism ".² It does not, however, seem probable that a man of " unspeakable credulity " would have been appointed to a post of this nature, and in all probability, Raphael

¹ Raphael Joseph was known as the " Tshlebi " or " Chelebri," and was sometimes spoken of as " Joseph of Aleppo," and " Raphael Joseph Halabi." ² *History of the Jews*, vol. v, pp. 124-5.

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Joseph was by no means as credulous as the historian alleges. On the other hand, there can be little doubt that he, like many other usually practical men of the world, at this period, fell absolutely under the spell of Sabbathai Zevi, among whose most faithful adherents he soon occupied a prominent place. At the period referred to, Raphael Joseph was one of the most popular men in Cairo. We read that "fifty learned Talmudists and Cabbalists were supported by him, and dined at his table. Everyone who sought his compassion found help and relief in his need". The support of a man like this was a tower of strength to the new Messiah who,—to a certain extent,—made a confidant of Raphael Joseph, to whom he disclosed some of his plans for his Messianic career. In 1665, Sabbathai again visited Cairo, this time to invoke the aid of Raphael Joseph for the community of Jerusalem, which was then oppressed by the demands of the local officials. The necessary money was provided by the *Tshlebi*, and Sabbathai soon left Cairo for the Holy City, where, in spite of the pecuniary assistance he provided, he did not succeed in impressing the Rabbis with his Messianic claims. As a matter of fact, he appears to have been banished from Jerusalem through the influence of those who disbelieved in him, and he never returned to the Holy City. When he divided up the world into twenty-six kingdoms, he

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requited Raphael Joseph for his services with one of these territories which he was to rule over under the title of King Joash.

In more modern times the Jewish inhabitants of Egypt lived on the whole in safety and comfort in the country of their ancient taskmasters, but in the year 1840, they were subjected to attacks brought about by "blood accusations", which were afterwards officially withdrawn, owing to the intervention of Sir Moses Montefiore, Crémieux, and others who visited Cairo for the purpose of aiding their brethren in Egypt and Syria, a task in which they were eminently successful.

CHAPTER V

EGYPT (*continued*)

The Alexandrites and the Cairenes—The Arab Domination of Egypt—The Nagids of Egypt—The Zaraf Bashis—Thevenot, Ogilby, and Vansleb—Le Bruyn and his Illustrations—Modern Jewry in Egypt.

THE history of the Jews of Alexandria is unlike that of their brethren in most of the towns of the world, inasmuch as they were present at the very inception of the city by its founder Alexander the Great. From that time, to the present day—a period of nearly twenty-two and a half centuries—the Jewish inhabitants of Alexandria have formed an integral, and at times extremely important, portion of the population of the town. Protected by the Ptolemies, they enjoyed almost complete civil and religious liberty, and according to a recently discovered inscription one of their ancient synagogues was dedicated to Ptolemy II and his sister and wife Berenice.¹

When the Arabs conquered Egypt in the year 641, and took possession of Alexandria, the treaty of capitulation stipulated that the Jews were to be allowed

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. x, p. 263.

Egypt (*continued*)

to remain in the city, and the Arabian General, Amr,¹ writing to the Caliph, stated that he found 40,000 Jews in the town. Early in the Christian era, they had been ruled, according to Strabo, by an ethnarch, who acting like "the archon of an independent city, gives special attention to the proper fulfilment of the duties and to the compliance with the various regulations". This official would appear to have been the precursor of the later Egyptian official *Nagid*, but the earliest date in which the latter title is referred to was not until about the year 952. Cairo was established by the conqueror of Alexandria, Amr ibn al-Asi, in 641, and was known at that period by the name of Al Fostat. Cairo proper was founded nearly three hundred years later by a vizier named Jaahar.² The older town was partially destroyed in 1168, but was rebuilt, and now forms part of the suburbs of Cairo. Maimonides called it a two sabbath days' journey from Cairo proper, and it is quite three or four miles away from the Jewish quarter in the Muski.

The great Jewish philosopher, Maimonides, settled at Fostat with his family soon after they left the city of Fez where they had formerly resided. Here he practised as a physician in the family of the Sultan

¹ See Note I, p. 55. ² According to Leo Africanus, Cairo was built by Gehoar, the vizier of Caliph Elcain, and was named by him Alchair. See his *Historie of Africa*, vol. ii, p. 137.

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Saladin, and here the most learned of Jewish scholars wrote his celebrated works "Mishneh Torah", and "Moreh Nebuchim". On his death, which occurred on December 13th, 1204, his remains were transferred for interment to Tiberias in Palestine and his tomb has ever been regarded as a place of pilgrimage for his people. When he died, Jews and Mohammedans alike observed public mourning for three days. A few years before the arrival of Maimonides in Egypt, Benjamin of Tudela paid a visit to the country, and he wrote a general account of the Jewish communities which came under his notice. He found only 3,000 Jews in Alexandria, and 2,000 in Cairo, and he estimated the Jewish population in Damietta at 500 souls. In addition he speaks of Jewish colonies at Mahalla or Mahallat, Sefitah, and Al-Butji, and other travellers of about the same period record a Jewish settlement at Reshid, the Rosetta of more modern times.

For a considerable period the position of Nagid was occupied by members of the family of Maimonides who held the post until the early part of the fourteenth century. During the fifteenth century the Jews of Egypt endured some persecution at the hands of the Mamelukes, and the Cairene Israelites suffered many hardships. The travellers Meshullam ben Menachem Volterra,¹ and Obadiah of Bertinoro,² have left accounts

¹ 1481. ² 1487.

Egypt (*continued*)

of the position of the Jews in the country, and it appears from the narrative of the former, that when he visited the country only sixty families were left in Alexandria, and the Jewish quarter in Fostat was in ruins, although two synagogues still existed. Cairo, however, still possessed 500 Jewish householders, in addition to some Karaites and Samaritans, and there were six synagogues in the city. Obadiah found still fewer Jews in Alexandria, but reported that there were 700 Jews in Cairo, together with 50 Samaritans and 150 Karaites. The Samaritans, we are told, "are the richest of all the Jews, and are largely engaged in the business of banking".¹ The Community had been strengthened and augmented by the arrival of refugees from Spain, who were well received by the other Jewish residents.

Better times, however, were coming for the Jews of Egypt, and the advent of the Turks considerably benefited the Jewish colonies. Within certain limits, the Jews were reasonably prosperous and fairly secure in their possessions, in addition to which they had the rare privilege—for those days—of the free exercise of their religious rites, while their customs and regulations were not unduly interfered with. Reference has already been made to the post of *Zaraf Bashi*, which was held early in the sixteenth century by Abraham

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. v, p. 64.

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de Castro. Many travellers assert that the position was one of great importance, as this official "takes care of the Grand Signior's Revenue". In all probability the post was something similar to that of a modern minister of finance, although Graetz expressed the opinion that it was merely that of a "Jewish mint master and tax farmer". Menasseh ben Israel writing—somewhat indirectly—regarding the office, a century later than de Castro's appointment, stated that "the greatest viceroy of whole *Europe*" (*sic*) was "the Bassa of *Egypt* : this Bassa always takes to him by ordre of the Kingdome a Jew with the title of Zaraf-Bassa, (Thresurer), viz., of all the Revenue of that gouvernement".¹

When Leo Africanus visited Egypt, Cairo possessed a numerous and busy Jewish colony. At this period the Jews did not frequent the agricultural centres, and, as George Sandys, the enterprising Elizabethan traveller, remarked, they resided "onely in cities". Leo tells us of "the goldsmiths street" of Cairo, which he says was "inhabited for the most part by Jewes, who deale for riches of great importance",² and there can be little doubt, that by this time, the Jewish Community was already rising in wealth and influence. Leo also mentions that he was informed "that at the

¹ *Humble Addresses*. ² *Historie of Africa* : Pory's Translation, Brown's Edition, vol. ii, p. 872.

Egypt (*continued*)

verie head or confluence of the branches of Nilus (about fifty miles from Cairo), there standeth a building of marvellous antiquitie, called the sepulchre of Joseph, wherein the dead bodie of Joseph lay, till it was by the Jewes transported unto the sepulchre of their fathers". Leo was probably in Egypt during Selim I's reign, and nearly a century elapsed before George Sandys came to Cairo (circa 1610). He reported, *inter alia*, that the customs were farmed by the Jews, who paid "for the same unto the Bassa twenty thousand Madeins a day, thirty of them amounting to a Royall of eight": He does not tell us much regarding the Jews of Egypt, but there is a touching reference to its Jewesses, in the account of his caravan journey from Cairo to Jerusalem, which he undertook in company with three other Englishmen and three Italians. "Among us", he remarks, "were divers *Jewish* women; in the extremity of their age under-taking so wearisome a journey, onely to die at *Jerusalem*; bearing along with them the bones of their parents, husbands, children, and kinsfolk; as they doe from all other parts where they can conveniently".¹

Thevenot devotes part of a chapter to a description of the Jews of Cairo, and many other references to them will be found throughout the Egyptian portion of his *Travels into the Levant*. Writing soon after the

¹ Sandys' *Travailes*.

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middle of the seventeenth century, he remarks on the great number of Jews at Cairo, and states " the Jews are very powerful in Egypt, and govern all the affairs of that Kingdom ; the Customes being in their hands, and they being the only Serats or Bankers. Besides that, they enjoy some offices about the Basha, which make them have his Ear ; and they daily put new inventions into his Head, for raising of Avanies (? Revenues). He has three principal officers, to wit, the Basha's *Schelebi*, which is an office instituted within these few years ; the Saraf Basha, and the Saraf of the Basha, who set their Wits continually a devising, and think of nothing else but of ways how to persecute the poor Franks. A Turk told me one day, that the Jews were the Turk Hounds for catching Money from the Franks ; for the Turks of themselves are neither malicious or cunning enough, to chase the Prey ; but when once the Jews have made sure of the Game, the Turks come in and carry all away ". It seems clear from the above statement that the Egyptian Viceroy relied on his Jewish officials to find out sources of revenue for the purposes of the state and for his privy purse, that both the " Tshlebi ", and the " Zaraf-Basha " were Jewish officials of very considerable power, and that they were evidently in constant attendance at the daily Divan presided over by the Viceroy of Egypt. It is stated that the Jews had

Egypt (*continued*)

settled in a large quarter of the town of Cairo specially reserved for them, which Thevenot stigmatises as "short, narrow, nasty, and stinking". Ogilby, who wrote concerning the same period, observed that they lived mainly in the "new city", which appears at that time to have been more favourably situated for residents engaged in commerce. He estimated that the town contained the large number of 100,000 Jews, for the most part engaged in trading and merchandise. They chiefly spoke "a mixt Language, a meet Gillymaufry hasht together of all usual Tongues now call'd Lingua Franca"; they still called the country by the ancient name of Mizraim, from "Mizraim, the son of Ham, being there the first planter".

Many of the older writers on Egypt speak of the works and traces of "Joseph, son of Jacob", and reference to these is sometimes made under the more unfamiliar appellation of "Joseph Jacobson", a name more reminiscent of the Ghettos of Europe than of the far-famed Viceroy of the Pharoah of whom we read in the Pentateuch. An interesting volume published in 1660,¹ refers to the canals constructed by Joseph, and Vansleb, whose work on Egypt was issued a few years later, speaks of a great pillar built by Joseph at Memphis to measure the rising of the Nile, and of a

¹ *The World Surveyed*, by Vincent Le Blanc.

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canal or channel called " Bahr Jusef ", or " The River of Joseph ", which passes the town of " Fium ", and which is believed to have been carried out by " Joseph Jacobson ". The same author tells us of " a very ancient Bridge of Bricks made for a passage for the River (Nile) when it overflows " at Sennuris, which was built by " Joseph, Jacob's son ", and of certain ruins at the top of a mountain near the monastery of Casciabe, which are all that is left of an ancient town which was once inhabited by the Patriarch Jacob, and is still called " Modsellet Jacob ". Then there is a long and detailed description of the wonderful well in the Castle of Cairo, " commonly named Joseph's Well ", but we are informed that " they that think that Joseph, Jacob's Son caused it to be digged, are deceived, for the Castle of Cairo was built many ages after Joseph's death ; and it is a common opinion of all Arabian authors that Joseph dwelt at Memphis, which was on the other side of the river near the Pyramids, and not on this side where Cairo stands ". Joseph's Hall, Prison, and Well are all described by Thevenot and Le Bruyn, the latter, however, contenting himself with a practical recapitulation of the former author's statements.

Vansleb states that he at first considered that the main channel of Cairo was kept in repair by the Turks, Copts, and Jews, in turns, each community doing the

Egypt (*continued*)

work once in three years, but he subsequently ascertained that the "Soubaschi of Cairo" was made responsible for the upkeep and clearance of the canal, although no doubt he took care that the Jews and Copts did not escape their share of the expense. He remarks on the antiquity of the Jewish settlement, and observes that the Jews "are very numerous, and are in great repute, chiefly at Cairo, and in the maritime towns; but unless it be such places, there are none to be found, for if their occupations call them into the country, they usually disguise and hide themselves: for when the country people find them out they abuse and affront them strangely". Nevertheless, according to this author, the Copts were far worse treated than the Jews. Basnage observed that the importance of the Jewish population in Egypt was due to the liberty they enjoyed. "Their Mechanicks", he asserts, "were dispersed over the Countrey, and in all the Cities", and it is interesting to observe that evidently the Jews did not confine themselves to dealing with merchandise or money, but worked with their hands as well as their heads. "In fine", he goes on, "they pretended (anno 1673) to be more numerous in this Countrey, than when Moses led them out of it", although according to the writer, the Jewish population had been steadily decreasing for some years. Jews and Christians alike had to pay a poll tax from "sixteen years of age",

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paying " every one head by head a certain price yearly, amounting to eight and forty bags ". Disputes between Christians, Turks, Moors, and Jews, were determined by having recourse to the decisions of their respective Consuls, without bringing the matter before the ordinary judges. The descriptions of Jewish costumes in Egypt which are to be found in Le Bruyn's *Voyage to the Levant*, are the most interesting because of the plates with which the letterpress is accompanied. One of the drawings depicts a Jew, apparently of middle age, playing on a kind of three-stringed guitar, which is, however, " play'd upon with a Bow just as a Violin ". The costume is stated to be typical of those in use in the seventeenth century by Egyptian Jews ; " Their Turban ought to be mixt with blew Strypes and the rest of their Habit must be of a Violet Colour ; which colour they are obliged to wear to distinguish themselves from others, for else there would be no manner of difference betwixt them and the Turks in their Habits ; the Persons of Note are much more neatly habited than that which we have here represented in the Cut ". Other authorities speak of Jews being ordered to wear yellow turbans, but this was probably at an earlier date. " The Jewesses . . . wear upon their Heads a Black Cap very long, round which is twisted a white or brown handkerchief stryped with Gold and Silver. Their Habits are

Egypt (*continued*)

commonly of stryp'd Silst : When I drew the Jewess that is represented here (Plate 93) she was sat upon a Sopha, smoaking a Pipe of Tobacco, whose stalk was of Egyptian Reed. . . ." ¹ The lady depicted, like most North African Jewesses, was inclined to corpulence, a condition which appears to have been universal with regard to them, when circumstances did not conspire to the contrary. Evidently the new custom of smoking had rapidly spread among the Jewish race in spite of Rabbinic qualms on the subject. We are told by a modern author, ² that smoking was very prevalent among the Jews of Cairo in the seventeenth century, and that they smoked more than their Polish co-religionists. The orthodox Cairenes struggled hard against the temptation to smoke on the Sabbath, and certain tobacco devotees "were accustomed to fill a hooka overnight on Friday, and thus they kept the tobacco alight for Sabbath consumption". Others, still more scrupulous, would not smoke themselves, but took the opportunity to visit a "Mohammedan friend on the Sabbath and sit in his room while the *latter* smoked".

During the greater part of the nineteenth century, and also at the present day, the Jews of Egypt have enjoyed almost, if not entire civil and religious liberty,

¹ *A Voyage to the Levant*, by Le Bruyn.

² *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*, by Israel Abrahams.

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and there can be little doubt of the general prosperity of the community. Considerable information respecting the modern Cairene Jews is afforded in the chapter entitled "Egypt in 1888", in Mr. E. N. Adler's *Jews in Many Lands*, which also contains a description of the ancient Jewish Synagogue in the Fostat quarter of Cairo. Here is preserved a *Sepher Torah* (Scroll of the Law) which, it is claimed, was written by Ezra. The officials of the Synagogue refused to show the Scroll to Benjamin II, and when he expressed his disbelief in the authenticity of the document, called him "a reformer, who would not believe in miracles". Benjamin of Tudela, who visited the Synagogue, must have also been a disbeliever, and does not mention the *Sepher*. Mr. Elkan Adler, however, was more fortunate and saw the famous scroll which Graetz had denounced "as a sham, a fraud, a delusion, and a snare", and he evidently was of the same opinion as the Jewish historian, as he did not think the scroll three hundred years old. He saw, however, a far more reputable document, a title deed or firman, relating to the ancient synagogue, which confirms the Jews in its ownership, and is about eight hundred years old.¹

¹ *Jews in Many Lands*.

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NOTE

I. The Fostat Quarter of Cairo contains what was once a magnificent Moqsue, erected in honour of Amr, or Amru, the conqueror of Egypt. In the centre of the court of this edifice there is a small building " tastefully ornamented, a lasting proof of Amru's justice, like the mill at Potsdam ; for it belonged to a poor Jewess who would not sell it to the Sultan, for which reason instead of having it pulled to the ground, he contented himself with building around it ".¹

¹ Prince Puckler Muskau, *Travels and Adventures in Egypt*. London, 1847.

CHAPTER VI

TRIPOLI

The Antiquity of the Jewish Settlements—The Jews of Cyrenia—Djebel Nefoussi—The Jewish Troglodytes—The Spanish Occupations—The Jews of Tripoli—Rabbi Simeon Ben Labi—Later Events.

IT is impossible to ascertain at what period the Jews first settled in the country now known as Tripoli, but the celebrated Arabian historian, Ibn-Khaldoun, asserts that the Nefoussi, an ancient tribe of the Louata (the Lybians of Antiquity), themselves professed Judaism, a fact which had, he asserts, hitherto been unrecorded by Jewish historians. These very early Jewish inhabitants—if they really were Jews—were strengthened and augmented by settlements of Israelites established in Cyrenia circa 322 B.C.¹ The first Jewish colonists “were introduced in conformity with the general policy of Ptolemy (I); and they soon became so numerous . . . that at length, no other country besides Palestine, contained so many individuals of their nation. Enjoying equal rights with the Greeks, and the special favour of the King,

¹ Hamilton, *Wanderings in North Africa*.

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they formed in the end a fourth order in the state, and were governed by municipal magistrates of their own . . . their frequent mention in the New Testament proves how important a part of the Jewish nation they constituted ".¹ Under Roman domination, which commenced circa 74 B.C., the Jews of Cyrenia lost some of their privileges, and the other inhabitants of the country appear to have oppressed them, now that the personal favour of the Ptolemies had ceased to aid them. Their numbers had, in all probability, greatly increased, as large bodies had joined them from Palestine after the Roman conquest. They appear to have always resented their position under the rigid rule of the Roman Empire, and their "fierce impatience of the dominion of Rome" existed from the earliest days of the Roman occupation of Cyrenia.² Frequently in rebellion, the risings of the Jews finally culminated in a sanguinary struggle in the course of which they are said to have slain 220,000 Greeks and Romans, but, after a contest marked by extreme ferocity, in the course of which great slaughter took place on both sides, they were finally suppressed by Marcus Turbo. The final decision of the rebellion took place in the reign of Trajan (117 A.D.), and Eusebius and Josephus both give accounts of the campaign, the

¹ See Note I, p. 79.
Empire, vol. ii, p. 384.

² Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman*

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former alleging that "the Jews attacked the Romans on every side", and that "Africa bore a very great share in the common calamity".¹ The population of Lybia is said to have been so reduced by these terrible encounters, that new colonies had to be established there, and many centuries had to elapse before the country was able to recover from the effects of the Jewish struggle for liberty.

According to the historian Morceaux, during the sixth century "the persecutions of the Emperor Justinian resulted in an altogether unforeseen result, as they absolutely contributed to the growth of Judaism in Africa".² Numbers of Jews fiercely hunted within the Roman Empire, or expelled from its confines, "took refuge with the Berbers in the lofty mountains of the desert, and here they resumed their propaganda, so that when the Arabs arrived on the scene, a number of the Berber tribes were more or less attached to Judaism particularly in Tripoli . . . and in the Sahara".³ "Under the Fatimite dynasty in Egypt, Jews from the oasis of Pessato established the most ancient community in Tripoli",⁴ but Benjamin of Tudela, who travelled through Northern Africa in the latter part of the twelfth century, makes no

¹ Morgan, *A Complete History of Algiers*. ² Slousch, *Un Voyage d'Études Juives en Afrique*. ³ *Revue des Études Juives*, vol. xlv, p. 22. (See also Slousch, p. 3.) ⁴ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii, p. 262.

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mention of Tripoli. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt, that a large and important colony of Jews existed for many centuries in the Djebel Nefoussi territory of North-Western Tripoli, and that the importance of this settlement—which has been commented on by Ibn-Khaldoun—continued until the end of the fifteenth century. The old tombstones, which are still to be found in the existing cemeteries, indicate the antiquity of the settlements, but, although the last visible inscription is dated 1392, it was not until the year 1496 that the Jews permanently quitted the town of Djado, the most important of their settlements in Djebel Nefoussi, and made their way to the port of Tripoli, and to the island of Jerba, off the Tunisian coast.¹ About this period, Arabs of a particularly bigoted character commenced to attack both Jews and Berbers, and Djebel Nefoussi became a centre of persecution for these races. The majority of the Jewish population consequently fled, and of those who remained, some embraced Mohammedanism, while the descendants of the few Jewish survivors are still to be found in two troglodyte villages named Msellata, and Derna, and in “the villages of Iffren which form the eastern portion of Djebel Nefoussi”.²

Fourteen years later than the exodus from Djebel

¹ Slousch, *Un Voyage d'Études Juives en Afrique.* ² *Ibid.*

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Nefoussi—that is, in the year 1510—Ferdinand, King of Spain, one of the bitterest of the foes of the Jewish race, sent an army to Northern Africa to harry and destroy the unfortunate inhabitants, and to endeavour to satiate his inordinate lust for the blood of his former Jewish subjects. At this period, the Jews of Tripoli were, in the main, a well-educated and prosperous class. They possessed good schools, eminent rabbis and teachers, and were altogether in a position superior to that of their brethren in most other parts of the world. The poor refugees from Djebel Nefoussi seem to have lived in another part of the town, and formed a separate community, until the exodus of the older Jewish inhabitants to Jerba, when the former took possession of the Jewish quarter. In the course of Ferdinand's campaign, "the Spaniards marched against Tripoli, and made themselves masters of the country, which they delivered up to pillage. All the Jews of the town, who formed an important community, were deported by the enemy to Naples, where many of them died of misery and sorrow, in this sad year of desolation".¹ Most probably, the Spaniards disdained to interfere with the poverty-stricken Jewish refugees from Nefoussi, and confined their attentions to their wealthier co-religionists. At all events, when nearly

¹ Joseph Ha-Cohen, *La Vallée des Pleurs*.

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forty years later the famous Fezzan Rabbi, Simeon Ben Labi, visited the town, he still found descendants of the Jewish fugitives in a wretched condition. Ben Labi had intended merely to touch at Tripoli, on his way to Jerusalem, but he was so struck by the miserable plight in which he found these people, that he resolved to abandon the pilgrimage that he had planned and to undertake instead the task of bringing back the almost outcast Jews to the knowledge of their religion and their law. He accepted the position of their Chief Rabbi in the year 1549, and "under his management matters rapidly improved and a modern community developed".¹

The new Chief Rabbi was an eminent Jewish scholar and cabbalist, and had never come into contact with members of his faith in so deplorable a state of ignorance as those whom he had found at Tripoli. He found that they knew nothing of the Jewish laws. They were not even acquainted with the Jewish prayers. Ben Labi's labours, however, were crowned by wonderful success, and, as a matter of fact, he actually re-converted these Jews to Judaism. Rabbinical law was established in Tripoli, and within a few years the town disputed with Jerba and Tunis the claim of being the home of Rabbinism in North Africa.

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. vii, p. 589.

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Although Ben Labi was a Spaniard, Tripoli was seldom chosen as a residence by the Spanish and Portuguese refugees. It was, of course, avoided during the Spanish domination, but even when Solymán, the Magnificent, conquered the Spaniards and drove them out in 1551, the Spanish Jews settled there only in very limited numbers, by which may be explained the scarcity of Spanish names among the Jewish population.

Tripoli was very little affected by the Sabbathai Zevi movement in the seventeenth century. An ardent disciple of the pseudo-Messiah, Miguel Cardoso, visited the town, and endeavoured to conduct propaganda there, but he was unsuccessful, and had to flee from the attacks of his co-religionists in the city. In the early part of the eighteenth century, the Jews, in common with the other inhabitants, were threatened with extermination by the Bey of Tunis, but the latter—whose force was weakened by an epidemic—had to retreat, whereupon the Jews established a local Purim, or festival of rejoicing, which is held on the 24th of Tebet, and is called “Purim Sherif”, or “Purim Kidebuni”. Another locally kept Purim is “Purim Borghel”, which is celebrated in memory of the defeat of a well-known corsair who burnt “at the stake the son of Abraham Halfon, the caid of the Tripolitan Jews” (circa 1792).¹

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii, p. 262.

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During the nineteenth century the Jews in Tripoli have considerably increased in numbers, and the community, as a whole, is prosperous, while the advent of the Italian régime in the twentieth century is likely to conduce still further to their benefit.

CHAPTER VII

TRIPOLI (*continued*)

Djado and its Jewish Inhabitants—The Exodus to Tripoli—Jewish Customs of Djebel Nefoussi—Curious Tripolitan Jewish Superstitions—Jewish Executioners—The Travels of the Beecheys—Jewish Costumes in Tripoli—A Stern Mosaic Punishment.

AN ancient document in the form of a letter, attributed to Maimonides, remarks that the Jews of Jerba, and of Djebel Nefoussi, although attached to their belief in the Almighty, had the same superstitions and the same practices as Berber Mussulmen. It is stated that though they were unobservant of many Jewish customs, they were particular not to eat the hindquarters of animals. In short, although they were not orthodox Jews, they were not Caraites. There can be little doubt that many of the Berber tribes embraced Judaism, and that the troglodyte villages still existing in Tripoli are inhabited by the descendants of some of these Jewish converts who retain some of the practices of Judaism. Many of these people have a tradition that their forebears came from Palestine, or from countries in the

Tripoli (*continued*)

vicinity of the Holy Land. Little is, however, known regarding the history and customs of these primitive Jews, among whom, it has been contended, Rabbinical Judaism was unknown.

At Djado, in the Djebel Nefoussi country, near the ruins of the old Jewish town long deserted by its former inhabitants, there is a subterranean synagogue and, not far off, caverns with mortuary niches. The whole of the Djebel Nefoussi country, in fact, contains ancient relics of the former Jewish population. There are ruins of synagogues, old cemeteries, troglodyte villages, and Jewish catacombs or subterranean mortuaries. Much of the information respecting these was brought to light by the publication of M. Slousch's *Voyage d'Études Juives en Afrique*. The ruins, still visible, however, no doubt only relate to a very small portion of the ancient Jewish settlements of Nefoussi. The Arabs who supplanted the Berbers had few scruples about the destruction of cemeteries, and nearly all of the Jewish ones were soon turned into cornfields, in which every now and then a stray piece of tombstone with an Hebraic inscription is turned up by the plough.¹ A "Hebraic-African" patois was current in Djebel Nefoussi and throughout the territory occupied by the Jews of the Tripolitan Sahara, and

¹ Slousch, *Voyage d'Études Juives en Afrique*, p. 8.

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M. Slousch gives examples of the existing differences between this Jewish lingua franca and pure Hebrew. The patois is designated the *Dialecte du Djebel*, and is still in constant use in Djebel Iffren and other Jewish settlements in Tripoli.

When the majority of the Jews quitted Djado and the territory of Djebel Nefoussi in the year 1496, the settlement must have been of considerable importance. In Djado alone there were no less than eighty Jewish jewellers, and the exodus of the Jewish population is still lamented by the inhabitants of the semi-deserted town. The Jews of Fossato or Pessato occupied the old Hara (or Ghetto) of Tripoli, after the former Jewish inhabitants of the port had retired before the Spanish conquerors, and, as previously recorded, these descendants of the ancient Jewish aborigines of the country, were brought back to a knowledge of Judaism by the celebrated Rabbi Simeon Ben Labi. To commemorate this great religious revival, it is the custom at Tripoli and in other communities on the coast for the eighteen benedictions (*Shemoné Asra*), which throughout the world are recited in the synagogues in silent prayer on Friday evening services, to be intoned aloud by the minister or Rabbi. Benjamin II observes with regard to this custom that the Jews of Tripoli informed him that their ancestors "in their ignorance . . . had only kept the Sabbath day, until a Chacham

Tripoli (*continued*)

had instructed them in the observance of Friday evening, and in memory of this they had determined to have this prayer recited aloud".¹ In many instances the Jews of Tripoli have customs very dissimilar from those in force in other parts of the world. For instance, although the admission of strangers to the ceremony is distinctly alluded to in the *Haggadah*, or *Seder* Ritual, and is practised throughout Jewry, the Jews of Iffren and of several other Saharan settlements never invite a guest during these evenings, or during the feast of the New Year. It is difficult to trace the origin of this ancient practice so contrary to the spirit of hospitality which is of the essence of Judaism.

The Jews of Djebel used to celebrate a third day of Pentecost, quite unknown to Judaism elsewhere. It was instituted by them in memory of Moses, when he struck the rock, and, by a miracle, produced a supply of water in an arid place. Curiously enough, the Mohammedans associated themselves with the celebration of this feast, believing that its commemoration would lead to the coming of a year conspicuous for its abundant supply of water. "This ceremony of libations, however, is not absolutely unique, as a similar custom was observed in Uzah by M. Huguet".²

¹ J. J. Benjamin II, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa*.
Voyages d'Études Juives en Afrique.

² Slousch,

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The evening of the first day of the month of Nissan is known throughout all Tripolitan Jewry as the night of " Bassisa ", or " the feast of the act of dipping ". It is a family celebration unknown to the rest of Jewry, and on its occasion the whole family come together to celebrate it. When the members are all assembled they soak or dip a preparation of mashed corn and barley, mixed with caraway and coriander seeds, in oil, and of this they all partake after the head of the household has pronounced the following benediction: " O! thou who openest without a Key, who gives without humiliating, give us and ours all that we need ". When we remember that the majority of the Jews of the Tripolitan interior were occupied with agricultural pursuits, it will not be difficult to recognize in this old custom the survival of an ancient ceremony of the Harvest Feast. Benjamin II gives a description of a dish called Busi which is, in all probability, the one alluded to above and which he states is thus prepared: " Water is boiled, and salt and wheat flour poured into it ; this is well mixed, until it becomes a thick hard dough, which is put into a large dish ; a greasy sauce is then made and poured over it. The whole family then seat themselves round the dish and, as knives and forks are not used, each plunges his hand into the dish, tears off a portion of the dough, dips it several times into the greasy sauce, and then

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eats it ". He says this dish is greatly enjoyed by Jews and Christians alike.¹

Some of the Jews of Tripoli take an oath in a very ancient formula which runs: " By the father, by the Lamp, I declare this to be the truth ". M. Sathon, who first drew attention to this curious asseveration in the *Révue des Ecoles de l'Alliance israelite*, declares that he does not know its origin, but M. Slousch asserts that he considers it may refer to the seven-branched candlestick, the symbol of the African Jewish ritual since the days of Carthage until the time of the Mellahs of the Middle Ages.² Another very quaint Jewish custom practised by the Jews of Tripoli relates to the destruction of Jerusalem. It is to have one corner of the wall of their dwelling-place coloured black, as a sign of mourning.³ At Djerba and Iffren, the Jewish *fiancée* who visits for the first time the newly whitewashed house of her husband, throws an egg at the angle of the wall situated in front of the gate so as to disfigure its whiteness. The Berbers of Nefoussi evidently copied an old custom of the Jews and thus—in a measure—wept for the loss of Jerusalem.

Few writers of the seventeenth century mention the

¹ Benjamin II, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa*. ² Slousch, *Voyage d'Études Juives en Afrique*. ³ [This custom is also prevalent among the Jews of Eastern Europe, who also when they erect a building, for the same reason, leave a small unimportant portion unfinished].

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Jews of Tripoli, and, as a matter of fact, neither Benjamin of Tudela nor Leo Africanus tells us anything about them. Of later writers, Ogilby just mentions the existence of Jews in New Tripoli, and alludes to their Poll Tax or to the "Tribute of the Jews". There can be little doubt, however, that they did not occupy as prominent a station as did their co-religionists in the other Barbary states. Their religion, in many parts of the country, was tainted with local practices and superstitions, and the absence to any great extent of Spanish and Portuguese immigrants did not conduce to the improvement of the status of their community. Some of the more recent works on Tripoli make mention of other curious traits and religious customs among the Jews, and we are told that "they have a fast of seven days and seven nights, which many pretend to have kept". It is stated that "the poorer Jewesses will work night and day till they have amassed money enough to purchase a piece of linen, which remains by them till wanted to bury them", and that "a poor Jewess will buy a basket (called here a cuffa) of lime, and go herself to decorate and white-wash the grave of any near relation she has lost, and plant fresh flowers round it. . . ." ¹ Tully informs us further that the Jews in Tripoli were exceedingly

¹ Tully, *Ten Years' Residence in Tripoli*.

Tripoli (*continued*)

observant of the ancient rites and practices of Judaism, but this was at a period when the reformer Ben Labi and his immediate successors had revived the ancient religion and swept it free from pagan and Moslem superstition and error and from the mixture of local customs and rites which had been assimilated in the course of centuries of profound ignorance.

Although some persecutions of the Jews undoubtedly went on from time to time in the town of Tripoli and other parts of the country, they were far better treated there than in Morocco. In the year 1817, the Jewish population of the port was estimated at 2,000 souls, who possessed three synagogues. "There are about thirty of them who are considered to be in good circumstances; the others are workmen, goldsmiths, etc.". The trade with Europe "is almost entirely in their hands; they correspond with Marseilles, Leghorn, Venice, Trieste and Malta".¹ The Jewish quarter was shut up every evening at sunset, and during the period when the Marabouts held their annual festival the Jews were not allowed to walk about in the streets. One of the works written about this period relates that during the author's visit a little Jewish boy who had been unwise enough to go out was killed by the Marabouts or their followers. With regard to costume, the

¹ Jackson, *Algiers: being a Complete Picture of the Barbary States*.

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use of gaudy clothes appears to have been forbidden to the Jews, but in other respects the attire adopted was not very different from that of the other sections of the population. Their turbans, however, had to be made of a blue material, and the Mohammedans, of course, avoided the use of this colour in their head-dress. Men had to restrict themselves to black slippers, but women could wear either black or yellow slippers, but were not allowed to use boots. "The garb of the Jewish women varies but little from that of the Moslems; their full dress is exactly the same, but the walking dress, instead of showing one eye, exhibits both".¹

In the course of his expedition, Captain Lyon paid a visit to the Gharian Mountains, and reported that at that period, there were many Jews living in these highlands, "whose dwellings are much cleaner and better excavated than those of the Arabs, and are also neatly whitewashed. These people as in Tripoli are the only handicraftsmen, and seem here to be rather better treated than elsewhere". They "are employed to weigh and prepare the Bey's share (of the harvest), and are well paid by the Arabs, in order that they may give short measure; for although using false weights is by the law of Mohammed a heinous crime, yet they fancy the sin is not incurred if the Jews defraud for them".¹ Many writers on Tripoli have

¹ Lyon, *Travels in Northern Africa*.

Tripoli (*continued*)

asserted that executions are not allowed to be performed by Mohammedans, "a sufficient number of Jews being always kept in reserve to discharge this public duty".¹ Captain Lyon remarks that the "Moors of Tripoli are never employed as hangmen; but the first Jew who happens to be at hand has that office conferred upon him", but there appears to be no evidence of the antiquity or otherwise of this custom.²

During the years 1821 and 1822 an expedition was formed to explore the northern coast of Africa from Tripoli eastward, and in their narrative of this expedition, Captain F. W. Beechey and Mr. H. W. Beechey give some particulars of the Jews of Tripoli at this period. In the course of their travels they visited an ancient port named Zeliten, the centre of a group of villages in which "a very considerable part of the population" was Jewish. They reported that they "were informed that the manufactures of the place are chiefly in the hands of these people; we found them uniformly civil, obliging, and industrious, and although much persecuted by the Mohammedan inhabitants, they appear to support their ill-fortune contentedly". Another place visited was Hudia, distinguished by its wells, and they were told that the Arabs had given the locality this name "in con-

¹ Russell, *History and Present Condition of the Barbary States*.

² *Travels in Northern Africa*.

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sequence of the bad water usually found there, and which they consider to be only fit for Jews ; the Arab term for a Jew being *Hudi* ". . . . The authors, however, did not believe in the Arab explanation of the name of the place.¹ They pointed out that the Jews were formerly very numerous in the Pentapolis,² and we find them described by Procopius as having once inhabited the country on its western extremity. Hudia may in such case be the last settlement they possessed in this neighbourhood, and the place may very probably have received its appellation from that circumstance.

On arriving at Benghazi, the writers ascertained that the town contained about 2,000 inhabitants, a large proportion of whom were Jews. They were "a persecuted race, but uniformly steady in their pursuit after riches . . . they are . . . the principal merchants and tradesmen of the place, and their well directed and unremitting industry alone enables them to meet the heavy exactions which are made upon their purses and property by the adherents to the religion of the Prophet. Their houses are generally cleaner and better furnished than those of most of the Mohammedans, and we never entered any of them

¹ See Note II, p. 79. ² Appolonia, Arsinoe, Berenice, Cyrene, and Ptolemais. Five cities in the district of Cyrenaica in Northern Africa. Vide *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ix, p. 589.

Tripoli (*continued*)

without finding the whole family employed in some useful occupation. We found them invariably civil and obliging, and apparently contented with their condition . . . the ' fierce impatience ' which formerly characterized the Jews of the Cyrenaica has disappeared with the probability of its being successfully exerted ; and poverty is now almost the only evil to which they will not quietly submit ".¹

A later visitor to Benghazi, James Hamilton, states " there are Jews here, into whose hands most of the less laborious trades have fallen, as is usual in all countries, especially in the East. . . They are ready to turn their hands to anything, but after showing themselves serviceable as may be, ask prices equal to about ten times what would be demanded in Bond Street. . . . It must be confessed in favour of the Jews, that if their filth and ignorance equal those of their brethren in all these countries, they are not behind them in industry. They are the only hard workers in the place. . . . One of the community, who by a series of most ingenious manœuvres has contrived to obtain English protection . . . is now broker to the Vice-Consulate ".²

Benjamin II, travelling in Tripoli in the middle of

¹ F. W. and H. W. Beechey, *Expedition to Explore the Northern Coast of Africa, from Tripoly Eastward*. — ² James Hamilton, *Wanderings in North Africa*.

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the nineteenth century, found that the Jews lived there "free and happily . . . they carry on a considerable trade, and are mostly very rich". The Community numbered "about 1,000 families", and possessed eight synagogues. Many of the Jews "dress in the same fashion as in Tunis, others in the fashion of Algiers, and many others wear a peculiar costume consisting of a long garment reaching to the knees, a short burnon (burnouse), white trousers reaching to the knees, and red shoes. The women wear for head-dress a red fez, wound round with a silk kerchief and beautifully ornamented in different ways. To this is added a long garment and a wide shawl hanging from the head, thrown gracefully round the upper part of the body. They wear slippers but no stockings, their hands and feet are covered with gold and silver rings, the nails painted red and the eyebrows black".

An interesting account of the Jews of Tripoli in the last quarter of the nineteenth century is afforded by Mr. Edward Rae, who travelled through "The Country of the Moors" at this period. He states that the Jewish population was still estimated at 2,000, the same number computed by Jackson sixty years previously. The Jewish Quarter is near the Bab el Djedid, or New Gate, and many of its inhabitants are engaged in the manufacture of ivory and silver inlays for the adornment of rifles and more peaceful articles

Tripoli (*continued*)

of domestic use. Mr. Rae employed a Jewish money-changer, whose brother received him "in a pretty and picturesque dwelling of the Jewish-Moorish type. We were very hospitably entertained with brandy and sweetmeats, of which, understanding it was good breeding to do so, we ate large quantities. We passed along the Har el Kebir, the chief street of the Jews' quarter, and entered the Synagogue. Such a disorderly, noisy, irreverent congregation, with its forest of dark blue turbans, I have never seen. One of the rabbis read from the Hebrew scriptures while the conversation was animated and general. . . ." The Jews of the town were stated to be very charitable, "and in every commercial transaction one in every thousand of value is set aside for the poor".

This author is responsible for a very curious statement, which is, however, uncorroborated by any other writer on Tripoli and the Tripolitans. In describing a visit to the Jews' Quarter, which, at that time, could be seen from a considerable distance in consequence of an extremely lofty palm tree, he observes, "We came to a square of waste ground, a dirty, ill-drained area. It had a melancholy interest, for many a poor Jewess, who had been unfaithful to her husband, was stoned to death here. Banishment, of late years, has taken the place of stoning".¹ It seems hardly probable that

¹ Rae, *The Country of the Moors*.

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this stern relict of the Mosaic Code could have survived the period of the dispersion, and it seems questionable whether the local authorities would have permitted the infliction of so drastic a punishment. Above all, unfaithfulness is an extremely rare offence among Jewish women, especially those unaffected or but little affected by European culture, and it is unlikely that those of Tripoli should have proved an exception to the universal rule. It is probable that the author misunderstood his informant and that the place in question served some other purpose.

Writing in the first decade of the twentieth century, M. Slousch remarks that in the Djebel Nefoussi country "the Jewish woman is absolutely free, and on an equality with the man. She is the worthy relative of the Hellenist Jewess, knowing how to defend her rights, against all intrusions of Judæo-Arabic customs in force in the maritime oases, with a spirit of independence which is truly characteristic".¹ At this period, the Jews of the town of Tripoli numbered 12,000 people, out of a total population of 40,000. The city contained eighteen synagogues, and several others were distributed in the other towns of the country.²

¹ *Voyage d'Études Juives en Afrique*. ² *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii, p. 262.

Tripoli (*continued*)

NOTES

I. "The thousands whom Ptolemy Soter took from their homes after he had subdued Judea were settled by him in comfort and happiness at Alexandria and Cyrene, as equal citizens with the Macedonians patronized by him and his son, and allowed the free exercise of their religion; they were assisted, too, by money and privileges in the pursuits of industry, so that many of their countrymen followed voluntarily, and all were raised to opulence and consideration".¹

II. Despite the opinions of the Beecheys, it would seem probable that the word "Hudia" signifies that there is some defect in the quality of the water. In Frederick Horneman's journal he mentions "Jahudie," and informs his readers that it was so called "because the water is bad, or other water is not to be found". The place is marked as Biltoradec on Horneman's map, "Jahudie" being a second name for this inland village or district, which is in Egypt, while "Hudia" is on the Tripolitan Coast about five hundred miles west of "Jahudie".

¹ See Note in "History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," by Edward Gibbon. Bohn's Edition, Vol. I, p. 35.

CHAPTER VIII

TUNISIA

The Jews of Carthage—The Early Spanish Refugees—The Foundation of Kairwan—The Arab Domination—The Spanish Occupation—Joseph Ha-Cohen's Account—The Spaniards Expelled—The Deys and the Beys—French Influence and its Effects—The Jews under the French Regency.

THESE is an old tradition among the nomadic tribes of Tunisia, that the Jews settled in the country before the destruction of the First Temple, and although this statement has been sometimes regarded as unfounded,¹ there can be little doubt that a colony of Jews existed in Carthage soon after the building of the city. The First Temple at Jerusalem was erected circa 1004 B.C., and Josephus maintains that Carthage was founded 143 years later, circa 861 B.C., while other computations of the date range from 878 B.C. to 826 B.C. As the First Temple was not destroyed until 587 B.C., it is quite possible that the Moslem legend may, after all, be correct. It is impossible, however, even to conjecture what the Jewish population of Carthage may have been, when

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii, p. 271.

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that renowned city and republic challenged the Roman Empire for the mastership of the world. In recent times, a Jewish necropolis with many inscriptions in Latin and Hebrew has been discovered to the north of the site of the city near the hill Gamart, and although this ancient rock-hewn cemetery only contains about two hundred tombs, there may have been other Jewish burying-places in the vicinity. "Modern scholars are inclined to identify the Biblical Tarshish with Carthage, since it is thus translated in the Septuagint, the Targum, and the Vulgate",¹ and the Talmud particularly mentions some erudite Carthaginian teachers of the Law. Nevertheless, in all probability, the Jews did not arrive in Carthage in any numbers until after the destruction of the Second Temple, and little or nothing is heard of them in the accounts of Hannibal's campaigns. There seems, however, little doubt that "after the dissolution of the Jewish State, a great number of Jews was sent by Titus to Mauretania, and many of these settled in Tunis. These settlers were engaged in agriculture, cattle-raising, and trades. They were divided into clans or tribes, governed by their respective heads, and had to pay the Romans a capitation tax of two shekels".² The Carthaginian Jews were more content under Roman

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol iii, p. 594.

² *Jewish Encyclopedia*,

vol. xii, p. 271.

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rule than were their co-religionists in the adjacent state now known as Tripoli. They gradually increased in numbers, and when the Vandals conquered the country in the year 439 A.D., the Jews were treated with much moderation.

The Byzantines, having subdued the Vandals, took possession of the country, in 534, the armies of the Emperor Justinian being led by the renowned general Belisarius. The status of the Jews was altogether changed by the advent of their new rulers, and very probably many of the Tunisian Jews fled to the mountains of Tripoli and took refuge with the Berber tribes in order to escape the cruelties of the "Emperor of the East". A century later, the Jewish population was augmented by the arrival of numerous former residents of Spain who fled from the persecution of the Visigoths, and certain of these immigrants also mingled with the Berbers who are supposed to have been converted to Judaism about this period. Then came the Arab invasion of Northern and Western Africa of circa 644 A.D., together with the arrival of the Arabian Jews, and Tunis and other Tunisian cities soon contained a very large number of Israelites by race or adoption.

About the year 670, the important town of Kairwan was founded by Ubka ibn Nafi. It rapidly acquired a large Jewish population, drawn from Egyptian, Arabian, and Cyrenia sources. In the subsequent warfare for Tunisian independence which ensued

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between Imman Idris and the Caliphs of Bagdad, the majority of the Jews took the side of the Caliphs. Their party was unsuccessful, and the conqueror made them suffer severely for their defection. For a time, their influence in the country waned under Imman Idris' rule, but under the Fatimites they again increased in power and numbers, notwithstanding the terrible decrees of Omar (*see* p. 92). They once more took part in the politics of the country, and their political importance from the end of the eighth to the commencement of the eleventh centuries extended throughout Tunisia and more particularly in Kairwan. With the accession of the Zirite dynasty, circa 1016, another régime of persecution set in for the Jews who suffered considerably in Kairwan, whence many fled to Tunis, where the oppression was less violent. But in the next century, the Jewish inhabitants of Tunis had their own turn of misfortune under the Almohade dynasty, when determined attempts were made to convert them to Mohammedanism. Matters settled down again about the middle of the twelfth century, when the Jews of Tunis had a quarter in the city allotted to them for a ghetto, and, "under the Hafsite dynasty, which was established in 1236, the condition of the Jews greatly improved".¹ In the year 1270, however, Kairwan was proclaimed a holy city and the

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii, p. 273.

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Jews of that town as well as those residing at Hammat were required either to leave, or abandon their faith ; some preferred the latter course, and nominally embraced Islam.¹

Shortly after the commencement of the fourteenth century, a Jewish official, bearing the title of "caid", was appointed by the Tunisian authorities to the post of Receiver of Government taxes. At this period, the Jews in the country had to pay a communal tax, for the benefit of the Jewish Community, to which every member contributed according to his means. He had also to pay a personal or capitation tax, for which all classes of the inhabitants were liable. In addition, "every Jewish tradesman and industrial had to pay an annual tax to the guild to which his trade or industry belonged".² Nevertheless, despite all these exactions and taxes, the commerce of the country was, in the main, in the hands of the Jews, who appear, however, to have been treated more cruelly in Tunisia during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries than in any other of the North African States.

It has been stated, that it was "long enough before the Jews enjoyed . . . an existence worthy of human dignity" in Tunisia. "Centuries of the greatest

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. vii, p. 416.

² *Ibid.* Vol. xii, p. 273.

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misery and of the most cruel oppression have succeeded in bending them, but with the toughness peculiar to their race, they have revived since they share the rights and liberties of the hereditary people".¹ As a matter of fact, the condition of the Jews during those two centuries was such that while refugees from Spain and Portugal flocked into Algiers and Morocco, they avoided Tunisia, and this may possibly account for the few Jewish personages of note who are known to have resided there during this period. Nevertheless, the Jews of Tunisia were empowered to conduct their own affairs, and they held their own courts and administered justice after their own rules. But the Jewish financiers, the learned rabbis, and the great Jewish scholars, who came in the train of the fugitives from the Iberian Peninsula kept aloof from the kingdoms of Tunisia and Tripoli. Matters did not improve in the first three quarters of the sixteenth century. During the wars under the Arabian Prince Hascen, who had first conquered the country and then suffered defeat at the hands of Barbarossa's troops, the assistance of Charles V of Spain was invoked by the defeated ruler of Tunisia. The Spanish potentate sent a powerful army to Africa, which, after two engagements with Barbarossa's armies, took possession

¹ Hesse-Wartegg, *Tunis : The Land and the People*.

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of Tunis and re-established Hascen on the throne as a vassal of Spain. The Jewish author, Joseph Ha-Cohen, published (1575) an interesting description of the results of this campaign so far as the Jewish population of Tunisia was concerned.

“ The Emperor Charles marched against Tunis in Barbary and took possession of it on the 21st of July of the year 5295 (1535) and Tunis was deprived of all its glory. The Jews were in great numbers there ; some of them took flight to the desert, where they were consumed by hunger and thirst, and reduced to the last extremity of distress ; they were despoiled of all they had brought with them by the Arabs, and many of them subsequently perished ; others were massacred by Christians who fell on them in an attack from the town ; others again were carried into captivity by the conquerors without anyone coming to their aid in this day of divine wrath. Rabbi Abraham of Tunis has written a description of the sufferings they endured, and expresses himself on this subject as follows : ‘ Here we were literally swallowed up ; the sword devoured us ; elsewhere they died of hunger and thirst, but what can we do ? It is God’s will ; if he has decreed that I shall die, I shall hope for nothing less.’ Thus far Rabbi Abraham. They were sold—men and women—as slaves, to various countries ; but at Naples and Genoa the Italian Communities ransomed

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a great number of them. God had intervened on their behalf ".¹

The Spanish domination of Tunis lasted from the year 1535 to the year 1574, and was marked by the cruelty and oppression which made Spain a by-word throughout the world for despotism, barbarity, and bigotry. The hatred felt for the Spaniards in Europe, Africa, and America, at this period, was most intense and fully deserved, and a thrill of relief must have been felt when the redoubtable Selim II swept them from Africa, a few years before their Armada was destroyed by the British. During the Spanish régime the Jews suffered severely in Tunis and other seaports in the country, but it is curious to observe that some centuries later, resident Jews of Tunis and other towns placed themselves under the protection of the Spanish among other Consuls, " and so escaped the power and jurisdiction of the Bey and his ministers. This is the reason that some of the Consulates in Tunis count their subjects or protégés by hundreds, and even thousands, amongst the Tunisian Jews ".²

Under direct Turkish Government and the subsequent semi-autonomous rule of the Tunisians, the Jews enjoyed " a fair amount of security, being practically guaranteed the free exercise of their religion,

¹ Joseph Ha-Cohen, *La Vallée des Pleurs. Tunis : The Land and the People.*

² Hesse-Wartegg,

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and liberty to administer their own affairs. They were, however, always exposed to the caprices of princes, and to outbursts of popular fanaticism".¹ Notwithstanding the disturbed state of the country, under the rule of the Turkish Deys, and the Tunisian Beys, the Jews prospered amid the perpetual struggles for supremacy. Early in the seventeenth century the Jewish community was greatly augmented by the arrival of a large number of Italian Jewish colonists. The newcomers, at first, joined the Spanish and Portuguese Communities, but later, at the end of the seventeenth century, they established their own congregation and communal institutions. In the year 1705, the Bey, Hussein Ben Ali, became the independent ruler of Tunisia, and from this period the position of the Jews steadily improved, and despite the oppression and suffering with which they had to contend, they were the principal business men of the country and exercised considerable influence, notwithstanding the ostensible contempt with which many of them were treated. A celebrated Jewish traveller who visited Tunis in 1772, tells of the influence which the Jewish Caid, Solomon Nataf, wielded at the Tunisian Court, and many authorities allude to the important status of the Jews of the

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii, p. 274.

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country in financial and commercial matters at this period.

Shortly after the middle of the nineteenth century, the Jews of Tunisia obtained rights equal to those of the other inhabitants of the country, mainly through the intervention of the Emperor Napoleon III, who, after two years of diplomatic negotiation, sent a French man-of-war to enforce the demands of the French Government for the enfranchisement of the Jews. "The Constitution under which these rights were secured was abrogated in 1864 in consequence of a revolution which entailed great suffering on several Jewish communities",¹ but in the year 1881, Tunisia became a dependancy of France and the Jews now possess full civil and religious liberty.

When Benjamin II visited the city of Tunis in the year 1853, he estimated the Jewish population to be about 16,000, but by the commencement of the twentieth century their numbers had nearly doubled, while the total number of Jews in the regency was estimated (1918) at 65,213 souls.

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii, p. 274.

CHAPTER IX

TUNISIA (*continued*)

The Jewish Necropolis at Carthage—The Ordinances of Omar—Jerba and Kairwan—Maimonides—A Jewish Corsair—The Jews under the Turks—Mordecai M. Noah—Benjamin II on Tunisian Attire—Wingfield's Remarks—Tunis in the Twentieth Century.

THE early advent of the Jews in the country now known as Tunisia was conclusively proved by the discovery of the ancient Israelite cemetery in the Gamart Hills in the vicinity of the city of Tunis, in close proximity to the site of Carthage. It has been suggested that the rock tombs there brought to light had been hewn according to the regulations laid down for their construction by Jewish tradition, while the fragments of Hebrew inscriptions fully determined their origin, which was further emphasized by frequent representations of the seven-branched candlestick, although most of the inscriptions were in the Latin language.¹ These tombs were richly adorned with mural decorations in relief and fresco, but they contained no vessels or furniture

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. iii, p. 617.

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except lamps. The embellishments served to indicate that the Jews of Carthage were both wealthy and artistic, while the small number of tombs suggest a small Jewish population. This possibly consisted of a number of merchants whose ancestors had embarked in oversea traffic when Solomon, King of Israel, laid the foundations of maritime commerce with Phœnicia and Northern Africa, and who had perhaps settled in Carthage not long after the city was founded. It may therefore be conjectured, perhaps with justification, that some of the present Jewish inhabitants of Tunisia are descended from ancient settlers in Carthage, while others may claim as ancestors the Jews who migrated there before the country was conquered by the Arabs. Many of these early, and indeed almost aboriginal, colonists had undoubtedly eventually to embrace the Mohammedan faith, and their descendants are still devotees of that religion, but others have in all probability remained true to the more ancient faith, from generation to generation, until the present day.¹ Others, again, like the Jews in the island of Jerba, have become tainted with Mohammedan superstition, and have assimilated certain religious practices and customs foreign to Judaism.

When Tunisia was conquered by the Arabs in the middle of the seventh century, the Jews came under

¹ Elisée Reclus, *Universal Geography*, vol. ii : North-West Africa.

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the enactments laid down by Omar I, who reigned from 634 to 644 A.D., which were formulated to differentiate between the Jews and the Christians on the one hand, and the Mohammedans on the other. The provisions dealt with taxes, places of worship, attire, cemeteries, festal processions, free entertainment of Moslem travellers, and many other matters. Neither Jew nor Christian could hold an official position in the state ; they were not allowed to enter a mosque, indulge in singing, or ride on horseback. Many of these rules, however, were not strictly enforced, but some of them were in practice as late as the establishment of the French Regency in the nineteenth century. About the end of the eighth century, the Jews rebelled against the power of Imam Idris, but being subdued, had to pay him a capitation tax and to furnish a certain number of Jewish virgins annually for his harem. A large body of the community, however, refused to accede to the demands of their conqueror and fled to the island of Jerba where their movements and their doings were less subject to his control. The remainder of the Jewish population lost a good deal of their power and influence for the time being, and tribes which formerly inhabited the country districts found it safer to seek protection in the larger towns and exchange their agricultural and farming occupations for commerce. In this way Kairwan and other important

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centres in Tunisia received a considerable addition to their Jewish population which had previously been diminished by the exodus to Jerba and by other causes. After the death of Imam Idris, the Kairwan Jews attained to prosperity, and the community began to acquire high repute among the Jews of the East. Many important institutions centred round the Synagogue, the supporters of which found money to ransom Jewish captives, and to contribute to the upkeep of Jewish universities. Jewish chroniclers speak of the "great scholars of Kairwan" who kept up an active correspondence with the *geonim*¹ of Babylon. Part of this correspondence has been discovered, and these letters throw a certain amount of light upon the intellectual activities of the city. The study of the Talmud and of the related literature was highly developed in Kairwan, and some of the heads of the College and other resident scholars became famous among the Talmudic authorities of this Period.²

Until the middle of the eleventh century, the Jewish Academy at Kairwan was an important centre of religious and literary activity, but soon after the death of the famous scholars Hananeel and Nissim (circa 1050) the college fell into decay. About this time the general community was suffering severely from the

¹ [The heads of the famous Jewish Academies.] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. vii.

² *Jewish*

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effects of the raids of the Bedouin, and a large portion of the Jewish population fled to Tunis. The importance of Kairwan as a Jewish centre thereupon rapidly declined, and has never revived.

Somewhere about the year 1165, Maimonides visited the island of Jerba, when he was on his way to Egypt where he eventually settled. He seems to have formed a very poor opinion of the Jewish inhabitants, and, indeed, of the Jews in general who were resident in North-West Africa. His views have been preserved in the form of a letter to his son in which he wrote : " Beware of the inhabitants of the West, of the country called Gerba, of the Barbary States. The intellect of these people is very dull and heavy. As a rule beware always of the inhabitants of Africa from Tunis to Alexandria ; and also of those who inhabit the Barbary coasts. In my opinion they are more ignorant than the rest of mankind " . . . ¹ Possibly the great Jewish philosopher was adversely prejudiced against his North African co-religionists by their failure, for the most part, to practise many of the precepts of Rabbinical Judaism, coupled with their assimilation of many local religious customs and superstitions. On the other hand, these Jews scrupulously observed all the *first* days of the principal Jewish festivals, and

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii, p. 272.

Tunisia (*continued*)

although they ignored the minor feast of Purim, they duly celebrated the festival of Hanucah.

At first the Jewish inhabitants of Tunis were not allowed to live in the city proper, but the ghetto, or "Hira", became their headquarters. After the proclamation of Kairwan as a holy city, Jews were not allowed to sleep even a single night in the town and they could only visit it by day by the special permission of the governor. Little information is available respecting the Jews of Tunisia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, although all authorities agree that they were severely persecuted at that period. Few travellers mention anything of them, and there are not many Jewish writers or scholars of importance who left accounts of their experiences in Tunisia. The communal affairs were directed by a council, which was presumably nominated by the Jewish Caid, who was himself appointed by the government and whose authority was supreme. He chose not only the council, but also the rabbis, and no rabbinical decision was held to be legal until it had received his sanction. The duties of the Council included the administration of law and justice among the Jews, the collection of their taxes, and the settlement of their local disputes.¹ When Barbarossa contended with the Emperor Charles V for the possession of Tunisia, he

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii, p. 273.

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entrusted the command of the garrison of Tunis to an old friend of his named Sinan Rais, a renegade Jew of Smyrna. Sinan had, at all events ostensibly, adopted the creed of the Prophet, and he was admitted to have been one of the boldest and most experienced of all the leaders under Barbarossa's banner. His courage and talents, however, did not avail on this occasion, as Tunis was taken by storm on July 25th, 1535. It is stated that Sinan used his influence with Barbarossa in preventing the massacre of the 7,000 (some authorities say 22,000) slaves who were shut up in the citadel. The old corsair must have favourably impressed Charles V, as nine years later the Emperor requested Apiano, the governor or prince of Elba, to release Sinan's son, who was in slavery on the island. Apiano made some excuses, in consequence of which Elba was raided by the commander of the Emperor's ships, whereupon the youth was released, and it was reported that "his Father no sooner saw him, but he dropped down dead thro' excess of joy and surprize".¹

Although the Jews of Tunisia experienced great relief after the expulsion of the Spaniards, in many respects their position was by no means enviable. Nevertheless they felt great joy when the cruel oppressors who had driven them from Spain over a century

¹ Morgan, *History of Algiers*. Sinan is sometimes alluded to as "Chefout Sinan Rais", Chefout meaning "The Jew".

Tunisia (*continued*)

and a half previously, and who had then persecuted them atrociously in their new home for nearly forty years, were driven out of Tunisia after their ignominious defeat by the Turks under Selim II. The Jews had, however, to submit to all kinds of sartorial regulations, and were obliged to wear a special costume consisting of a blue frock with linen sleeves, wide linen drawers, black slippers, and skull caps. They were allowed to wear stockings only in winter, and to ride only on asses or mules, and then without a saddle. Subordinate officials imposed all kinds of tasks upon them which they were compelled to execute without any compensation.¹ Custom became with them, not surprisingly, second nature, and when all the regulations with regard to costume were withdrawn after the French occupation, many of the Jews had become so accustomed, perhaps even attached, to the obligatory attire, as to neglect to exercise their liberty with respect to their clothing until a considerable period had elapsed.²

After the establishment of Turkish domination, the position of the Jews in Tunisia gradually improved. The advent of the Italian Jewish colonists brought a class of Jews to the community which had hitherto been denied them owing to the unwillingness of the

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii, p. 274.
Tunis: Land and People.

² Hesse-Wartegg

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Spanish and Portuguese Jews to settle in the country, and in the middle of the eighteenth century the older congregation combined with the later arrivals in joint support of the communal burdens. By degrees, scholars and prominent rabbis began to settle in the country, and with the rise of intellectual conditions, political progress once more began to make headway. Travellers began to note the activity of the Jews in commercial matters, and the influence of the immigrants from Leghorn eventually secured the trade with Italy to the Tunisian Jews. When Jackson visited the country in 1817 he reported that the Jews had practically monopolized the trade with Italy and exported the same sort of goods to that country as were shipped to France.¹

A few years previously, the United States Consul to Tunis, Mordecai Manuel Noah, a prominent American Jewish politician and philanthropist, sent an extremely interesting report on the condition of the Tunisian Jews to the Washington Government. He maintained that in spite of some apparent oppression, the Jews were among the leading people in Tunis. They were at the head of the customs, they farmed the revenues, and they guarded the Bey's money and valuables, being his treasurers, secretaries, and interpreters.

¹ *Algiers. . . . The Barbary States.*

Tunisia (*continued*)

They were prominent in art, science, and medicine, and possessed so much influence, that the public functionaries were loth to incur their hostility and cultivated their alliance and their friendship.¹ Benjamin II arrived at Tunis soon after the middle of the nineteenth century, and ascertained that some of the Jewish inhabitants were very rich, counting even, as he said, millionaires among them. Many held government appointments. The Government allowed the Jews every privilege, but they suffered at times from the fanaticism of the Arabs. Most of them still dwelt in the Jewish quarter or Mellah, although they had no need to confine themselves to that part of the town. By this time some of the men had adopted European dress while others had modified the old regulation costume. The women of the wealthier classes showed much extravagance in their attire. They wore " a folded garment and wide trousers of silk, and satin, which are quite tight from the knee, and ornamented with rich embroideries of gold and silver. Over all this they put on a kind of silk tunic without sleeves, reaching as far as the knee, composed generally of two different coloured kinds of stuff. They cover their head with a fez, round which is wound a silk kerchief, with the ends hanging down. They likewise

¹ *Travels in England, etc.*

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wear stockings and shoes. Upon their trousers, in particular, great extravagance is lavished ; and I was told that they often cost the rich from 400 to 500 reals. The married women wear round the waist a kind of girdle. . . . They are generally very beautiful, rather stout, and in their beauty resemble their sisters in Bagdad. . . . The ladies of Tunis are more corpulent. The Bagdad ladies are very industrious, while it is quite the contrary with those in Tunis. In Tunis as well as Bagdad the girls marry from the age of thirteen and upwards".¹ Benjamin gives some description of the curious superstitions and superstitious customs of the Tunisian Jews, some of which were practised by the women but concealed from the men. He mentions that in the city of Tunis alone there were four large synagogues and over fifty smaller ones. He also gives a description of the Jews in the other towns in Tunisia, some of which had very important communities, and of the Jewish inhabitants of the country districts.

Much interesting information respecting the Jews of Tunisia is afforded in a work written by the Hon. Lewis Wingfield, who travelled in the country some thirteen years later than Benjamin II.² Evidence is given of the custom of some of the Jews of Spanish descent of placing themselves under the jurisdiction of

¹ *Eight Years in Asia and Africa.*

² Wingfield, *Under the Palms in Algeria and Tunis.*

Tunisia (*continued*)

the Spanish Consul, a practice already mentioned. On one occasion a Spanish official having granted protection to a certain Jewish family from the extortion of the Tunisian Government, the authorities came to the Consul and demanded the surrender of the Jew. The Spanish Consul refused to give up the man, and threatened to send for a man-of-war to defend him, whereupon the Bey withdrew his claim. The Jews are reported to have had another place of refuge when in extremity and to have at times sought protection in the vicinity of certain mosques, which possessed privileges resembling those of the Savoy and Alsatia in old London. At this period, the Jewish population of Tunis was estimated at 20,000, about one-sixth of the total inhabitants of the city, and the display of wealth noticeable in the town was put down to the preponderance of the Jewish inhabitants. They had acquired from the Bey the exclusive right to manufacture wax, which brought them a relatively enormous income. They were also engaged in distilling brandy, nominally for their own use, but really for supply to the Moors and Turks who bought it at a high figure. The author gives a most amusing description of a Jewish dance to which he was invited, which affords an interesting picture of Jewish social life in Tunis at this period. He describes one of the Jewish dancers as being "a vision of beauty, lithe and young, with a

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warm yellow light shining down upon her: a really lovely girl of about seventeen, exquisitely made, as we could easily see through her very scanty raiment, her great tender eyes shining out . . . from under heavy eyelashes ”.

Wingfield was of the opinion that the garb of the Jewish women is the same as was worn by the women of Palestine in the New Testament period. In this view he is supported by the author of *Africa Illustrated*, who states that according to tradition the Jewesses of Tunis “ have preserved the identical costume of the Hebrews of Scriptural times ”. According to this writer the principal features of this venerable costume consisted of a pointed cap on the head, a very loose jacket often richly embroidered, descending to a little below the waist, tight hose to cover the legs, and either slippers or a kind of Hessian boot with tassels.¹

About the year 1876, when Edward Rae travelled to Kairwan, he found that neither Christians nor Jews were allowed within its walls. A mile from the town he came to a little village called Dar al Mana—the House of the Obstacle or Prohibition—beyond which point Jews were forbidden to approach the city. Rae evidently found means to enter the city, and discovered, inter alia, that owing to the absence of Jews and

¹ W. R. Smith, *Africa Illustrated*.

Tunisia (*continued*)

Christians, there was not a silversmith's shop in the town.¹ The liturgy of the Tunisian Jews is in many respects unique in Judaism and is distinct from the German and Polish, or the Spanish and Portuguese versions, while some of the prayers are recited in Arabic. Of these an example is mentioned by Élisée Reclus, who quotes from Maltzan, who on his part observes that it "is precisely the one most frequently uttered, and indeed the only one that the women use". This ancient petition beseeches the Lord "to let loose his wrath upon Spain, as well as on Ismael, Kedar, and Edom".²

According to Hesse-Wartegg the Jews were still oppressed in Tunisia after the French occupation, and only succeeded in obtaining full liberty in the last days of the nineteenth century. By this time the Jewish population of Tunis had increased to 30,000, but the houses in the ghetto were still dingy, dirty, and dilapidated. The Jews were very observant in religious matters, and made pilgrimages to Jerusalem as frequently as the Mohammedans went to Mecca. The author gives a most interesting and entertaining account of Jewish life in the Tunisian capital, which is, however, marked by some obvious errors, for example, the statement that the young Jewish girls were

¹ *The Country of the Moors.*

² *Universal Geography.*

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fattened by being fed with " the flesh of young dogs ". He also refers to the tight-fitting hose-like attire adopted by the Jewish women, and asserts that, according to some historians, these garments were part of the dress of the old Biblical Jews.¹

At the commencement of the twentieth century the Jews in Tunisia enjoyed considerable prosperity and possessed twenty-seven synagogues, some of which are of considerable size and importance. They are for the most part engaged in commerce, but a considerable number follow the liberal professions, while others are prominent in financial circles. The Island of Jerba still has a Jewish population of 4,500, and many other provincial congregations form prosperous and wealthy communities.²

¹ *Tunis : Land and People.*
p. 276.

² *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. xii,

CHAPTER X

ALGERIA

The Earliest Arrivals—The Jews under the Arabs—Simon Ben Smia—The Arrival of the Spanish Jews—The Rise of Algiers—Misfortunes in Tlemcen—Oran—The "Gorneyim"—The French Occupation—Jewish Civil and Religious Liberty.

THE existence of certain Jewish epitaphs discovered in Algeria which are believed to date back to the first or second century of the Christian era serves to indicate that Jewish colonists arrived in that part of Northern Africa at an early period.¹ It may be conjectured, therefore, that after the destruction of the Second Temple, a certain number of Jewish fugitives found their way to Algeria as they did to other countries of Northern Africa, but there is no reason to believe that the immigration was considerable. The advent of the Vandals may have led to an increase in the Jewish population, for after the conquest of the country, Justinian legislated for the Jews, in common with other races who had settled in Algeria from time to time. Later, as in Tunisia,

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. i, p. 381.

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there was a great immigration of Jews from Spain, whence they had been driven by the persecutions of the Visigoths, and these new arrivals are said to have conducted a Jewish propaganda among the native races.

The situation of the Algerian Jews under the Arab rule varied with the different dynasties and their individual rulers. On the whole, they prospered, and there was no serious persecution until the Almohade line came into power about the middle of the twelfth century. These fanatical rulers attempted the conversion of the Jews under their rule, and succeeded in securing the apparent apostasy of a number of individuals, while at the same time many others fled the country. For a considerable period, Algeria was split up into four smaller states, Tremecen (Tlemcen), Tenez, Algiers, and Bugia. These diminutive kingdoms were at peace with one another for a lengthy period, until the King of Tlemcen broke his treaties, and was conquered by the King of Tenez.¹ During the era of the quadripartite division of Algeria, the Jews gradually raised themselves to a situation that was considerably better than that of their co-religionists in Europe in general and in the Iberian Peninsula in particular.² At the end of the fourteenth century, the Spanish barbarities caused thousands of Jews to

¹ Morell, *Algeria*.

² *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. i, p. 381.

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flee to Northern Africa, and a large number of these settled in Algiers, Oran, and the other towns of Algeria. There they were, on the whole, hospitably received, being required only to pay a small capitation tax to the Moslem authorities. Simon Ben Smia or Semia, who is said by some writers to have been Chief Rabbi of Seville, has been named in connection with this settlement (circa 1390).¹ When Ben Smia "and his fellow exiles landed on the African Coast, the Rabbi entreated Sidi-Ben-Jusuf, a celebrated Marabut of Miliani, for an asylum, which was readily granted". The Arab Chief and the Hebrew Rabbi drew up a formal agreement, guaranteeing the rights of the newcomers. "The Rabbis of Algiers assured me that this deed is still kept in the principal synagogue of the City".² Ben Smia succeeded the celebrated Rabbi Isaac ben Sheshat Barfat (otherwise known as "Ribash") as Chief Rabbi of Algeria, in 1408, and held the office until his death in 1444. He seems to have been a great leader, a most indefatigable writer, a physician, a poet, and a learned theologian. The Duran, or Durand, family, of which he was one of the most distinguished members, are believed to have originated in Provence.

¹ According to the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, his name was Simon ben Zemah, Duran I, known under the abbreviation of RASHBAZ. Duran was his family name. ² *The Tricolor on the Atlas; or Algeria and the French Conquest*, by Francis Pulsky.

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At the end of the fifteenth century, the fall of Granada and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, resulted in another great exodus to Algeria, and according to an old chronicler, "Those who arrived at Oran were so numerous that the Arabs on seeing their vessels, thought that enemies were descending upon them and killed a number ; but afterwards the Moslem prince took pity on them, and, through the intervention of an influential Jew of the country named Dodiha, permitted them to land. He had board cabins erected outside the city for them and the cattle they brought with them".¹ The newcomers were gradually absorbed into the older Jewish community, and thus Arabic continued to be the current speech of the Algerian Jews, although in Morocco, Spanish eventually became the dominant language. Large numbers of the immigrants settled in the city of Algiers, which had hitherto been a town of somewhat insignificant importance, and a mere "bone of contention between the Kings of Tlemcen and Tunis". When the Turks took possession of the country, they made Algiers its capital, and this further attracted Spanish immigration. The Jews were found useful citizens and were encouraged to settle. Later they were allotted a separate quarter of the city, although they were only permitted to have a certain number of business

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. i, p. 381.

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establishments, and were subjected to special taxation.¹

At the commencement of the sixteenth century the town of Tlemcen—the ancient Cæsaria—was a rich and populous centre for the Jews, but, according to Leo Africanus, the Jewish quarter was sacked during the interregnum which occurred after the death of King Abuhabdilla (Abu Abd Allah Mohammed) in 1516 A.D., and the inhabitants “were all so robbed and spoiled, that they are now brought almost unto beggarie”.² In the same year, Barbarossa, who had been called to the aid of the King of Algiers against the Spaniards, treacherously seized the kingdom and then, with the aid of the chiefs of the adjoining territory, captured Tlemcen.³ At this period the town had ten large synagogues, which, however, were not sufficient to hold all the worshippers who presented themselves. Leo remarks that they “were in times past all of them exceedingly rich”—a frequent fable respecting Jews—but the fatal year, 1516, appears to have had terrible consequences, as the old chronicler admits that by the year 1517, “their number and strength is wonderfully decreased”.

In the year 1509 the Spanish conquered the province

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. i, p. 386. ² Leo Africanus, *History and Description of Africa*. ³ Otherwise known as Tremizen, Tiemcen, Tlemsen, Telensin.

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of Oran, and Cardinal Ximenes, who had made use of the services of a Jew to facilitate the capture of the territory, severely oppressed the Jews as a mark of his gratitude. He did not, however, expel them, in spite of the Inquisition, and they were allowed to exist, if not within the town of Oran, at all events in its immediate neighbourhood, until the year 1669, when they were all banished, under Taxardo, who turned the principal synagogue into a church.

In the other provinces of Algeria, the change from Arab to Turk domination had considerably improved the condition of the Jews. They certainly had to put up with heavy taxation, and the contempt of the dominant race, but they had the right to manage their own affairs and their religion was not interfered with, although these privileges were denied them almost everywhere else. Nevertheless, at times, their lot was very bitter, and they were nearly always in the hands of the Deys, and the Pashas, and sometimes inferior officials, who occasionally when it suited their purpose allowed the populace to pillage their houses. Their fear of the Spaniards and their natural hatred of Spanish rule was very intense, and when Charles V suffered his disastrous defeat at the hands of the Algerines in the year 1541, the joy of the Jews was unbounded. The rabbis composed prayers, and the poets wrote poems, to commemorate the misfortunes

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of their hated oppressors, and long after these occurrences, the anniversary was observed joyfully in the Algerian synagogues. During the occupation of the Kingdom of Tlemcen by the Spaniards, the latter instituted a persecution of the Jews, in the year 1563, in the course of which 1,500 Israelites are said to have been murdered or enslaved. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that the Algerian Jews were full of joy whenever the Turks were victorious over the Spaniards, despite the fact that their lives under the Moslems were by no means always secure, their possessions immune from robbery, or their fate in general one to be envied. In the middle of the sixteenth century, the Emperor Charles V sent Jacob Cansino, a Jew of Oran, to represent Spain at the court of Morocco, and descendants of this envoy held the office of Spanish Consul for more than a century. During all this time, Jews were expelled from all Spanish territory, with the exception of Oran, and had the envoy put his foot on Spanish soil, he would have run the risk of suffering severe penalties. These and other anomalies have puzzled students of the Jewish question in Spain, and it is perhaps as difficult to comprehend the appointment by the Emperor as it is to understand the acceptance of the position by the envoy, after the diabolical treatment of his co-religionists.

At the commencement of the seventeenth century,

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the city of Algiers had, according to the historian Haedo, 150 Jewish houses, and, according to another report, 8,000 Jews. Another authority, Jean Baptiste Gramaye, asserts in his *Africa Illustrata*, that "in the Jews' quarter, the house of Jacob Abum had 300 inhabitants, and that of Abraham Ralhin 260".¹ This statement will assist in reconciling the two preceding ones. Soon after this period, a new colony of Jews consisting of emigrants from Italy, mainly from Leghorn, settled in Algeria. They took up their residence for the most part in the city of Algiers, where they were called "Gorneyim" by their co-religionists, and they soon attained great importance as social economic factors.² During the greater part of the seventeenth century, Algeria was almost continually at war with either Spain, France, or England, mainly in consequence of the exploits of the Algerine pirates, and the cruelty shown by them to their prisoners. Nothing, or practically nothing, is heard of Jewish slaves among the victims of these pirates, although it is improbable that there were not a considerable number of Jewish prisoners in the vast number of prizes which they took in the course of their operations. Whether the Jews were released on their landing or ransomed by their co-religionists, does not appear, and

¹ Morell, *Algeria*.

² *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. i, p. 382.

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it is surprising that the point has not been mentioned by writers on the Barbary States. By the end of the seventeenth century, the Jewish population of Algeria had increased considerably, and in Algiers alone there were said to be nearly 10,000 Jews. By this time, the two sections of the community were less distinct, and there was an admixture of Spanish and Hebrew in the Arabic language which the Jews used. The "Gorneyim", too, began to make their influence felt, although, up to this period, they had kept themselves separate from the other Jewish sections of the community. Their business activities had considerably increased, and some of their leading representatives acted as bankers to the Deys, negotiators between the Turkish authorities and European powers, and councillors to the highest officials.

During the eighteenth century, the position of the Algerine Jews continued to improve, more especially that of the "Gorneyim", who had by this time "acquired an ever-increasing importance in the economic and political life" of the country.¹ Their success, however, was jealously resented by the janizaries, and these and other discontented sections of the population fomented a riot, in the course of which the mob attacked the Jewish quarter, killed the principal Jewish

¹ *Jewish Encyclopædia*, vol. i, p. 386.

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banker and other Jews, and destroyed much property. The Dey seems to have acquiesced in the attacks on the Jews, who fled for protection to the foreign consuls. These riotous outbursts took place in the year 1795, and were supposed to have occurred owing to the opposition to an internal loan floated by two Jewish bankers who had previously obtained a monopoly of the grain trade. Three years previously, Oran had been permanently evacuated by the Spaniards, and the Jews were invited to return to the province where they were allotted a large tract of land on which they settled, and built a new town adjacent to the older part of the city. A letter written by a Dr. Naudi to the Rev. C. S. Hawtrey, dated October 15th, 1816, gives a vivid and interesting account of a persecution of the Algerine Jews which broke out in the year 1804. Dr. Naudi was a local secretary of the Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews. His letter is dated from Malta, but he appears to have been intimately acquainted with what occurred. He states that at this period the Jews were nowhere in a better position in Barbary than they were in Algiers, but that a violent rebellion broke out in the neighbourhood of the town, and the Jews were unjustly charged with participation in the outbreak. "The traitorous promoters were persons in the government, and nearly

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intimate with the Dey . . . but as some of these gentlemen borrowed money from a merchant Jew, the Jews were considered as the perpetrators, notwithstanding they were not concerned at all in the affair". The attitude the Dey assumed was, that if the Jews had not lent the money, the rebellion would not have ensued, therefore the Jews should be considered as the true revolutionists. "They were therefore taken away, tortured, and racked in a variety of barbarous ways, and made to suffer every kind of torment, particularly that most terrible one, of being suspended alive by a long rope on the outside of the tower walls, having hooked nails thrust into different parts of the body, often under the chin bone so as to suspend the body perpendicularly. Several hundreds lost their lives in this desperate way; others were punished by burning, some by stripes; and the greater part, by confiscation of their goods and properties, were reduced to a state of poverty. . . . This contingency was the cause of great migrations of the Jewish people from Algiers to other parts of Barbary, particularly to Tunis. Numbers of the more religious among them . . . resorted to Palestine and to the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, as if the time of their restoration was at hand".¹

¹ Perceval Barton Lord, *Algiers*.

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The French expedition to Algiers commenced in the year 1830, and eventually freed the Algerian Jews from the cruelties and persecutions carried out under the Turkish régime. The Israelites welcomed the advent of the French as a veritable deliverance, "and the very day after the entrance of the French troops at Algiers, they became devoted allies of the civilizing power which made an end of Turkish barbarity in the country".¹ The services of the Jews were very useful to their new protectors, and many of the Algerian Jews joined the French forces, served with ability in the field, and took a prominent part in the defence of Oran, which was besieged by Abd-el-Kader in 1833. With the fall of Constantine, in October 1837, the whole country passed into the hands of the French, and a new era opened out for the Jews. It did not follow, however, that their position was one of absolute freedom, although they were relieved from the contempt and oppression of the Turks. The adjustment of the local laws between Jews, Moslems, and Christians, and the assimilation of the Algerian Jews into the ranks of the French citizens, was spread over a considerable period. The laws were frequently changed, and full civil, religious, and political rights were only obtained in the year 1870, while at the end of the

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. i, p. 384.

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nineteenth century, an outburst of anti-Semitism in the provinces resulted in attacks on the Jews in Oran and other towns, followed by riots in Algiers itself. The present Jewish population of Algeria is about 65,000, of whom more than 10,000 reside in Algiers, while important communities exist in Oran, Biskrah, Constantine, and other places.

CHAPTER XI

ALGERIA (*continued*)

The Almohade Persecutions—The Miraculous Voyage of Simon Ben Smia—Isaac Ben Sheshet—Algerian Jews under the Turks—D'Aranda's Slavery—The Manumission of Bellinck—Jewish Funerals—Benjamin II in Algeria—Morell and Wingfield—The Twentieth Century.

MANY of the inhabitants of Jewish communities in Algeria maintain that their ancestors settled in North Africa after the destruction of the Second Temple,¹ but their claim has not been substantiated. The ancient sepulchral inscriptions relating to Jews which have been discovered in the country, bear Latin, not Hebrew, names, and so the presumption that the owners of these names came from Italy, and not direct from Palestine, is fairly warranted. Nor is it considered that the number of Jews who came to Algeria at this period was very large, "since the proportion of Jewish epitaphs in the great mass of Latin-Algerian inscriptions is very small".² Practically nothing is known of the life and habits of these early Jewish settlers, although their

¹ See Note I, p. 138.

² *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. i, p. 381.

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religious influence among the native races is supposed to have been very considerable. In fact, one Arabian ruler considered it his duty to stamp out all traces of Judaism from his kingdom, in consequence of the continued conversion of the Berber races to the ancient faith. The persecutions of the Jews, instituted by Abd al-Mu'min, in 1146, were carried out by the Almohades owing to the supposed existence of a myth ("of which it is impossible to find the least foundation in Moslem tradition")¹ that the Prophet had allowed the Jews religious freedom for 500 years, but that after that period, they were to be forced—if still unwilling—to adopt the faith of Islam. Large numbers of the persecuted people ostensibly apostatized, but the Moslems "becoming suspicious of the sincerity of the new converts, the Almohades, in order to distinguish them from Moslems of longer standing, obliged them to wear a special garb".²

During the years 1390 and 1391, fearful massacres of the Jews were enacted throughout the provinces of Castile, Aragon, and Andalusia in Spain, and in the Balearic Islands, and thousands of Jewish refugees made their way to the coast cities of Northern Africa. Large numbers of the exiles landed at Algiers, Oran, Bugie, and other cities, and from thence penetrated

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. i, p. 381.

² *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 381.

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into the interior of Algeria, where they settled with the permission of the Moslem authorities, and were well received by their Jewish co-religionists, and by the population at large. The exodus of the Spanish Jews to Algeria has been the source of many tales and legends, among which there is an account of a miracle which appears to have been firmly believed in, even in modern times, by Algerian Jews.¹ The story is as follows: When the persecutions of the Jews in Spain commenced in the year 1390, Simon Ben Smia, the chief rabbi of Seville, a man of exalted capacity and great fortune, was, by the King's order, arrested, and thrown into prison, together with sixty other heads of Jewish families, and many of the Moors, who still remained in Seville. This arbitrary act was followed by a number of exactions from the Jews and Moors throughout the Kingdom, and finally, by an order for the execution of those who were in prison. The night preceding the day fixed for the execution had arrived, and all his companions in misfortune were plunged in the deepest woe, when suddenly Simon, who had been engaged in fervent prayer, started up, took a piece of charcoal, and sketched on the wall the figure of a boat; then turning to those who wept, "Let all", said he, "who fear God and wish to leave this place, put a finger as I do,

¹ Lord, *Algiers, with Notices of the Neighbouring States of Barbary.*

Algeria (*continued*)

on this boat ". They all did so, and immediately the figure became a real boat, commenced motion of its own accord, passed through the wall, which opened to allow it to do so, glided through the streets of Seville, to the great astonishment of all the inhabitants, without injuring a single house, and directed itself straight towards the sea, into which it plunged with all its crew. Still left to its own direction, it continued its course, until in due time it came to anchor in the road of Algiers, then inhabited only by Mohammedans—Moors, and Arabs. The rabbi having sent an embassy to the Algerines, explaining by what means he had been brought to their coasts and requesting an asylum for himself and his companions, was answered that they could do nothing without consulting the Sidy Ben Yusef, a famous Marabout, who then resided at Meliana. Messengers were therefore immediately despatched on horseback, and the saint's answer proving favourable, the Algerines, headed by their Chiefs, went out to receive the strangers, met all their needs, introduced them into their city, and assigned them lodgings. As late as the year 1835, when Lord's work on Algiers was published, this legend was still implicitly believed in by Jews of education in Algeria, and when a French visitor attempted to laugh at the story, in the presence of a Jew, " a person of good information and master

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of many European languages ", he was at once stopped by the grave reply, " It is an article of our faith ".

Ben Smia is said to have entered into a treaty with the Algerines, and among the conditions of the admission of the refugees were " the free exercise of their religion—liberty to build as many temples as they might require—to engage in commerce, exercise trades, and make wine and liquors." This treaty, written on parchment, the rabbis of Algiers say they still possess and retain among their archives. Nevertheless, its stipulations were subsequently ignored, and the condition of the Jews of the country was by no means satisfactory until the French established their regency more than four hundred years after the arrival of Ben Smia and his fellow fugitives. At the time of the great Spanish exodus to Algeria, among the fugitives was the famous Rabbi Isaac Ben Sheshet who had been a resident of Barcelona, and had finally returned to his birthplace, Valencia. When he arrived in Algiers, in 1391, he was appointed Chief Rabbi, in the face of much opposition, in which Ben Smia joined. Ben Sheshet was much revered by the Algerian Jews, and pilgrimages to his tomb are still made on the anniversary of his death. When Ben Smia was elected Chief Rabbi after Ben Sheshet's death, the community exacted a promise from him, that he would not, " like his predecessor, have his election confirmed by the

Algeria (*continued*)

regent ". It is stated that much against his will, he had to receive a salary as he had no other means of existence, having lost all his property in the Spanish persecutions. He was much respected in court circles in Algiers, and on his death was succeeded by his son, who died in 1467.

The Jews in Algeria under Turkish rule were, to a certain extent, an ill-used and oppressed people and suffered from the insolent arrogance of the Mohammedans of every class, but they nevertheless were in the possession of some compensations which were denied to them in many European countries. Although they were by no means admitted to equal rights with the Mussulmans, the observance of their manners and customs was not interfered with. It is true that their attire was limited to the more sober colours, but this was to a large extent nominal, for the law was not observed with strictness, unless some over-officious official wished to assert himself, or some ostentatious Israelite decked himself out in clothes which attracted the cupidity of a not too friendly mob. As a matter of fact, Jews, in many countries, have preferred to wear dark-coloured clothes without any legal obligation to do so. It has been stated that Jewish women were forced to go with their faces unveiled, but this can hardly have been a hardship to the daughters of Israel, with whom veiling has never been a general

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custom. Jews certainly had extremely heavy taxes to pay, but their activity in business and the advantages of their environment for traffic, compensated them to some extent for the extra imposts for which they had to provide. It has been observed that the Algerian Jews are superior in bodily strength to those of Europe. "Under the sky of Africa . . . the wondrous people have preserved their special type ; an aquiline nose, a black beard, a magnificent but deceptive eye, a clear but colourless complexion. Their appearance is less scriptural and engaging than the interesting characteristic of the Lithuanian Jews. . . . As always where they muster strong, they engross almost all the commerce : bankers, brokers, and agents. . . . Nothing can be done without them. They attend to all branches of industry, save agriculture. Active, intriguing, and versatile, they form a great contrast to the apathy of the Moors ".¹

Ogilby states that they were no better used in Algeria than in all parts of Christendom. For besides the imposts levied on them, "it is permitted to everyone, yea and to the Christians themselves, to offer them a thousand affronts . . . Free Christians or Merchants . . . cannot take Lodgings in the Houses of Turks ; but in those of the Jews they may, who

¹ Morell, *Algeria*.

Algeria (*continued*)

have their quarters assigned them in the City".¹ Nevertheless, Hakluyt observed that "the securest lodging for a Christian . . . is a Jew's house: the Jew and his effects being responsible for the damages he receives". Ogilby remarks that the coins generally in circulation were of foreign origin and that "the Jews have the most Profit and Command of all this money, being indeed the only Exchangers, for which they pay an annual Rent to the Bassa". He says that the most certain part of the income of the country was the "Poll Money" of the Jews and the Moors, which was generally collected from the head of the family.

Much curious information respecting the Jews in Algeria in the middle of the seventeenth century can be gleaned from the pages of a little work entitled *The History of Algiers and its Slavery*, by Emanuel d'Aranda, "sometime a Slave there". D'Aranda sailed from St. Sebastian in the year 1640, and was soon after captured and sold as a slave in Algiers. In the course of his adventures in the services of his master (who was Ali Pilchini, or Ali Pellegin, Captain Pasha of the Algerine Gallies and Galeots), he was shipwrecked near Tetuan, and he mentions that the Jews, of whom a number were on board, prayed to

¹ John Ogilby, *Africa*.

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Abraham, Isaac, and Moses. At Tetuan he got lodgings with a Jew in the Mellah, and finally a Jew of Ceuta negotiated his ransom between the "Christian Fathers" and the Governor of Tetuan, and obtained his freedom in March 1642. Although it would thus appear that the Jews acted as agents between the owners of slaves and those treating for their ransom, they were not themselves permitted to purchase any Christian slaves or otherwise to hold them. They do not, however, seem to have been prevented from purchasing negro or infidel slaves. D'Aranda states that renegade Jews were not admitted into the army, "but the Jews who would serve, eating Swine flesh before they renounce, affirm, that by this means they are become Christians, and then they renounce with the same solemnities as are observed by the Christians". At the public wells and conduits, "Those who come to these Conduits for water, take it in their Turns save only the Jews, who are to give way to every Slave who comes after them, and to be served last of all".¹

D'Aranda tells a curious tale of one of the Jewish slave ransom agents, which depicts the Jew in rather a more favourable light than is usual by writers on Algeria: "It happened that having some business with a Jew, named Pharette, concerning a Bill of

¹ Morgan, *History of Algiers*.

Algeria (*continued*)

Exchange, the Jew asked me whether I knew not a Dunkirk slave named John Bellinck? Whereto replying that I did, the Jew said to me, 'Pray bring me where he is, I would fain speak with him, for I have order to redeem him, and send him home to his country' ". Later d'Aranda found means to bring Pharette to Bellinck, and said to the latter: " 'I bring you good news, this Jew hath order to pay your ransom' . . . Bellinck was so surprised at these words that he cast himself at the feet of the Jew, saying to him in Dutch: 'Ah, good master Jew, redeem me for the death and passion-sake of Jesus Christ' ". D'Aranda was extremely amused at the way in which Bellinck expressed himself to a man holding Pharette's religious views, and "could not forbear laughing at that compliment, which the Jew observing, asked me the reason of it". So he told him in Spanish what Bellinck had said, whereupon the Jew also laughed at it, and said to him: "Tell him in your language that what I intend to do for him shall be upon no other account than his own". Pharette had evidently not been converted to the doctrine of vicarious atonement.¹

A curious seventeenth-century proposal connects the then newly-established Jewish community in

¹ D'Aranda, *History of Algiers and its Slavery*.

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London, in the time of Charles II, with the manumission of slaves in Algeria. "A large sum of money appropriated for the redemption of captives having been lost, somehow, between the Navy Board and the Commissioners of Excise, it was gravely proposed, 'That whatever loss or damage the English shall sustain from Algerines, shall be required and made good to the losers out of the estates of the Jews here in England' ".¹

Under the Turkish Administration, the organization of the Jewish Algerian settlements steadily and successfully developed. At the head of each community was an official selected by the Arab or Turkish governor of the town or district, who was entitled the *mukaddam*. This officer was the authorized representative of the Jews, and "the sole legal intermediary with the Moslem authorities for all administrative and financial affairs. He was assisted by a council appointed by himself, which, apart from its administration of the general affairs of the community, saw to the levying and collecting of the taxes imposed on the Jews of the country".² The Rabbinical Tribunal could inflict penalties and fines, settle matrimonial questions, and the succession to estates, and could even sentence culprits to corporal punishment, and

¹ *Christian Slavery in Barbary*, p. 29.
vol. i, pp. 382-3.

² *Jewish Encyclopedia*,

Algeria (*continued*)

these judicial pronouncements and sentences were carried out by the *mukaddam*. The general law of the country was only appealed to when one of the parties to the suit was not of the Jewish faith. The revenues of the community were obtained from taxes levied upon articles of food, prepared according to Jewish custom by officials selected for such purposes, in addition to which, collections were made for different objects four times a year. At this period the Jews resided in a separate portion of the towns, but in the country districts, although they lived apart, they were under the immediate authority of the local sheik, which rendered their position extremely precarious. The "native" Jews were quite unprotected, but the Italian and other foreign protected Jews claimed the assistance of the consuls of their respective countries with considerable benefit.

An extremely interesting and instructive account of the Algerian Jews in the early part of the nineteenth century is given in Lord's work on Algiers, in the course of which it is stated "that the influence . . . they exercise on the government, commerce, and revenues of the states of Barbary, renders a notice of them necessary in any work professing to treat of these several subjects". Lord paints a rather sombre picture of the state of the Jews in Algeria, shortly before the French occupation of the country, but in

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many respects their services in a business capacity appear to have been almost indispensable to the other inhabitants. Much is said of the beauty of the Jewesses, and one author is quoted as saying of the Barbary States that "any one who has visited these countries, will not require to be reminded of the beauty of the daughters of Israel". Their dress is thus described: "A fine linen chemise with long loose sleeves, and over this a large robe, covering the body, but leaving the neck and breasts bare: it is made of cloth or velvet, according to the circumstances of the wearer, and is embroidered round the edges; their petticoat is commonly dark green superfine cloth, embroidered with gold, and reaching no farther than the knee, the legs are bare, and the feet thrust into little slippers, so small that they just cover the toes and can scarcely be kept on in walking. Round the waist they wear a sash of silk and gold, the ends of which, adorned with little metallic plates, are suffered to hang loosely behind, so that when they move these make a tinkling noise. The unmarried women wear the hair plaited in different folds, and flowing down the back; they have a very graceful method of twining a wreath of wrought silk round the head, and weaving it behind into a bow. . . ." Men and women, married and unmarried, all evidently delighted in personal finery, although at this period they hardly dared

Algeria (*continued*)

to move outside their houses from fear of robbery or attack.

It is stated that the Jews have imbibed many Moslem superstitions and observances and frequently consult "diviners" and fortune-tellers. Benjamin II also alludes to the belief in "sorcery, witchcraft, and incantations" prevalent among the Algerine Jews. Many of these curious and superstitious customs were observed during sickness, or at deaths and funerals. An account of the burial of a Levite is related by Mr. Riley, who states that at the funeral he observed "about a dozen women in tattered garments, who formed an inner circle round the grave, while about a hundred were standing at a little farther distance. . . . The twelve women who had at first been quiet, seemed to be seized with a sudden paroxysm of grief, and began to approach each other with their hands raised above their heads, stretching the palms towards each others' faces. Then they commenced howling, at first moderately, but soon broke out into the most violent wailings and yellings, which it is impossible to describe; they tore their faces with their long finger-nails, and made the most hideous contortions of their features; the mania was now communicated to all the women present, who joined in the lamentations, but the others did not tear their faces like the twelve, who kept it up, stamping with their feet, and going

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round in their circle ; the blood and perspiration mixing together, and streaming from their faces, ran all over their filthy garments, and dyed them red in streaks from head to foot. This paroxysm lasted from fifteen to twenty minutes, when they were so much exhausted, as to be under the necessity of ceasing for a few moments to take breath, when they commenced again and went over the same ceremony, seemingly with redoubled vigour ”.

There is also an account of the funeral of a rabbi, which was communicated by M. Rozet, who was present. At this interment, no women appear to have been permitted. Two men bearing lighted tapers accompanied the corpse, which was borne to the grave followed by the sons and nearest male relatives of the deceased, and many rabbis, all wrapped in long cloaks with the hoods drawn over their eyes. The body was taken to the tomb of the Great Rabbi, Simon ben Smia, where it was laid down, “ and all the assistants, taking off their slippers, advanced one by one, to kiss it, after which a short prayer was chanted ”. After this a sermon was preached by one of the rabbis, a collection made for the poor, and the corpse taken to the spot reserved for the interment of the rabbis. After the body had been placed in an open grave, a second oration, prayer, and collection took place. Then, a further prayer having been chanted, the

Algeria (*continued*)

bearers suddenly seized the body and ran with it as fast as they could for about a hundred paces, pursued by eight old men and two rabbis, who on coming up with them immediately formed a circle about the body, holding hands, and commenced to move round it, singing. After having made several turns, one of the rabbis left the circle, took some gold pieces which had been brought, wrapped up in paper, and threw them as far as he could in different directions, taking care to throw one for each turn which the others made. When he had done, the circle opened and the bearers again seizing the body, bore it back with equal rapidity to the grave, into which it was immediately lowered, a few branches placed over it, and the earth thrown into it.¹ Lord's account of the customs of the Algerine Jews extends to nearly seventy pages and far exceeds in detail and interest any similar relation of the kind. Benjamin II devotes only about ten pages to Algeria, although he paid a lengthy visit to the Regency in 1854, making a stay of six months in Algiers, where he published two works. Among other places described by Benjamin is the town of Bona, on entering which, after leaving Tunis, it seemed to him as if "he had entered paradise after a sojourn in purgatory". Here he found a very large and ancient synagogue,

¹ Lord, *Algiers*. See also Note II, p. 139.

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which was revered by the Mohammedans as well as the Jews in consequence of an extraordinary legend with which it is connected, which is related by Lord as well as Benjamin II.¹

At the time of Benjamin's visit, he estimated the Jewish population of Algiers to consist of 1,000 families, and Morell, whose work was published about the same time, reckoned that soon after the French occupation, there were about 5,000 Jews in Algiers, and over 19,000 in the whole of Algeria. Benjamin states that the houses of the Jews "are built in the European style and are very neat and clean. Some of them live in the European, others in the African style". Morell remarks that the "upper town" of Algiers "retains its Arab appearance, and is almost exclusively inhabited by Moors and Jews", the latter having twenty-five synagogues in the city. Benjamin, however, only speaks of twelve synagogues, two large and ten small ones; he reports that "much care is bestowed in the schools upon the instruction of the children in the Hebrew and French languages".²

Morell's account of the Jews of Algiers has many points of interest, as by the time it was written the Jewish population had had nearly twenty years of liberty under the French flag. He remarks that "the

¹ See Note III, p: 140.

² Benjamin II, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa*.

Algeria (*continued*)

Jewish women of Algiers have generally a greater freedom, and are more confidentially treated by their husbands, than the Moorish women. They go out at option, and do their own commissions. They are commonly pretty. Matrons or maids, they go with uncovered faces; and their coiffure consists of a *sarmah*, or conical head-dress resembling the ancient hennin, and the cap of the French *cauchoises*. The rest of their costume consists, with the common women; of a full blue cotton gown, without being confined at the waist, with very short sleeves, letting those of the chemise descend below them. The poorer sort put a kind of cap on their head instead of the *sarmah*, letting the point fall back on the neck. Like most of the men, they generally go bare-legged and bare-footed. The young girls wear their hair long and plaited in a tail, to which they tie red and blue ribbons. As a coiffure, they wear a small but very elegant cap of green velvet, adorned with a golden tassel, and with a border also of gold, forming the sides of that kind of Greek cap which passes gracefully under their neck, where it is tied. Some sweet faces and regular features are often seen amongst them. Nothing can be more graceful than a pretty Algerian Jewess going to the fountain, and carrying a pitcher on her head".¹ Morell further observes that the Jews gave the French a

¹ Morell, *Algeria*.

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hearty welcome, and their condition has been so much improved by their advent that they have turned the tables on their former tyrants. He considered that it might take time before they shook off the effects of their former burdens and insults, " but if they put their hands manfully to the plough, and drop the convict's dress and mind ", and recognize " the wisdom of disencumbering themselves of their narrow pride and bigotry . . . a bright future may very probably await this singular people ".

Benjamin II wrote that " on the whole it can be asserted without hesitation that the Jews in Algeria live in a happy condition under the French Government ", although the senior Jewish inhabitants spoke of the decline of religion, and the falling off in business profits, since the arrival of the new masters of the country. Among the accounts of Algeria about the last quarter of the nineteenth century, few books give such interesting details as can be found in the work entitled *Under the Palms in Algeria and Tunis*, by Lewis Wingfield. The author devoted considerable attention to the Jewish population, and in the course of a description of the city of Biskrah, remarks that the old town was almost exclusively inhabited by Jews, although the community was not mentioned by Benjamin II, who had visited the country only fourteen years previously. " The Jewesses ", says the author,

Algeria (*continued*)

“ wear nothing but gold (in the way of ornaments), and a handsome set they are. There is one now passing down the street, fine-featured and delicate-complexioned, her long black Oriental eyes shaded with soft dark lashes. She wears the black pointed cap of Constantine, festooned with thick gold chains, and about her neck is draped soft filmy folds of crimson gauze, all specked with shining dots. A pleasant and refreshing sight is her small head and natty attire, as seen by the side of the preposterously gaudy ‘ ladies of the desert ’ ”. Wingfield gives some description of the Jewish quarter in Tlemcen, through whose queer labyrinths he found his way to the busy scene in front of the palace. Here “ Jewesses, in groups, were wrapped in mantles of Pompeiian red, with wide gold border, which is peculiar to them. Jews, their husbands, cool and comfortable-looking, were dressed in white full linen breeches and embroidered satin jackets, with wonderful gold turbans rolled loosely round the red tarbouche ”. When Benjamin II arrived at Tlemcen, circa 1854, he estimated the Jewish population at about 500 families, evidently in a fair financial situation. Lady Herbert remarks that the Jews of Algeria, who are very numerous, preserve the characteristic appearance of their race. “ Under the Mohammedan laws, they were always subject to outrages and persecutions, but thanks to the patience

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and tenacity by which they are distinguished, they appear to endure everything, and they have made themselves indispensable to their persecutors by their profound knowledge of commercial affairs, which seems to be their almost exclusive monopoly at the present time".¹ Lady Herbert gives an exceedingly interesting account of the ceremonies attending a modern Jewish wedding in Algeria, with other information respecting Jewish customs at this period. At the commencement of the twentieth century the Jewish population of Algeria contained a large number of artisans, as well as merchants, traders, and agents. The chief rabbi, until the withdrawal of all state concern in religious affairs, was appointed by the President of the French Republic on the recommendation of the Central Consistory of Paris. The City of Algiers has nineteen synagogues, of which six are official and thirteen private.²

NOTES

I. "History has recorded the date and cause of the Israelitish immigration into West Africa, after the destruction of Jerusalem; but the immemorial establishment of the Scenite Jews, who in the whole extent of Barbary are mixed with the Berber population,

¹ Lady Herbert, *L'Algerie Contemporaine*.
vol. i, pp. 286-7.

² *Jewish Encyclopædia*,

Algeria (*continued*)

would lead us to suppose that it forms the foundation of this immigration from the East and Syria, which Sallust has related in these words: 'Afterward the Phœnicians—some for the sake of lessening the pressure at home, others from motives of ambition and curiosity—built Adrumetum, Hippo, Leptis, and other cities on the sea-shore'. Numerous Jewish migrations occurred during the persecutions of Adrian; and in the third century these emigrants formed independent tribes in the Hedjaz near Medina, and near Mecca; and their religion spread in Yemen. If we may believe the Arab historians, most of the African Berbers and Arabs professed the Hebrew faith in the seventh and eight centuries, and the preaching of Mohametanism made no way amongst them. This would appear to explain the phenomenon of the Jews forming till lately (1843) a fourth of the population of Algiers, and more than four-fifths of that of Oran".¹

II. M. Rozet was much at a loss to know the meaning of this last singular ceremony, and after some enquiry was at last informed by a rabbi that as soon as a man dies the Devil always stations himself at the door of the house, in order to get possession of the body when on its way to its last abode. He is appalled, however, by the number of rabbis, whom he finds walking at each side of the body, and, afraid to execute his project,

¹ *Algerie*, by Baron Baude, vol. iii, 1843.

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at once follows the procession in hopes of finding some favourable moment, or of slipping into the grave along with the deceased. To prevent this is the object of the last manœuvre. "The Devil", said the rabbi, "who was at that moment certainly near the grave, or perhaps in it, seeing that we took away the body, ran after it: we then formed a circle to prevent his taking it away, and while he was amusing himself collecting the pieces of gold, which one of us had thrown with that intent, we profited by the moment to escape from his pursuit"!

III. "The community has a very large ancient synagogue called Grebe, in which, on the north wall, the place of the ark of the covenant is formed by a small room to which they ascend by several steps: in this room are the Pentateuchs. This little room has a particularly sacred character. One day I remarked several Mussulman-women enter it, seat themselves for some time on the floor, and, after having offered a gift, retire. I asked the cause of this; for it seemed to me strange that Mussulman-women should visit a synagogue in such a manner; and in reply I heard the following story:—Several hundred years ago, at very high tide in stormy weather, a plank was driven very near ashore; some Mussulmen tried to fish it out, but it receded; and the same thing happened when some Christians endeavoured to draw it out: some

Algeria (*continued*)

Jews, however, having come and made the attempt the plank was driven to land, and there it remained Fastened on this plank they found a Pentateuch, and this they conveyed to the synagogue, and displayed it there. From this miracle arose the belief in the holiness of the room where the Pentateuch was preserved, and whenever a woman, either Mussulman or Christian, is not well, she has only to come here, to pray and make offerings, in order to recover. I expressed my disbelief in the miraculous power of this sanctuary, and explained the history of the fishing-out of the plank and the Pentateuch from the sea quite simply ; for, if the story was true, perhaps some Jew might have suffered shipwreck and might have fastened the Pentateuch to a plank in order that it might not be lost ; but, that it should have happened that Jews had drawn it up, when Mussulmen and Christians had failed to do it, I declared it to be either an accident, or that the sea must have become calmer during the time. After such an inference they considered me an unbeliever, and scolded me as such ”.

CHAPTER XII

MOROCCO

The Jews and the Berbers—The Jewish-Berber Queen—The Foundation of Fez—Spanish and Portuguese Refugees—Samuel Palachwe—Jewish Diplomats—Muley Arxid's Treachery—The Toledanos—Memaran and Ben Hattar—Ben Hattar and the British Treaty—The Infamous Muley Yazed—The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.

MOROCCO is perhaps the most important of the Barbary states ; it is formed out of a considerable part of the ancient Mauretania. Some time before the Christian Era, Mauretania was conquered by the Romans, and in the year 45 B.C. it became a Roman province. It is held by some authorities that even at this early period Jewish colonies had long been established in this part of the world, and both the Daggatuns (or Daggatouns)¹ and the Berbers are said by them to be of Jewish origin. John Davidson, who was ultimately murdered by the wild Arab tribes of Morocco, stated in a letter to the Duke of Sussex (1836), that he was told by some Jews in the Atlas mountains that their ancestors " did not go to the Babylonish captivity, that they possess many writings, that they have a city cut out of the

¹ Leo Africanus, *History and Description of Africa*.

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solid rock with rooms above rooms, in which they dwelt upon their first coming to this country ; and that there are some writings carved in these rocks which they attribute to some early Christians who came and drove them into the valley which they now inhabit". In a village in the Warikah district near Morocco city, Davidson was visited by some Jews, "who stated that they have here the tombs of two rabbis who escaped from the second destruction of Jerusalem ; that their nation has resided here ever since that event".¹ It is therefore quite probable that at a very early date Jewish colonization existed within the territories now known as Morocco, and this view is supported by the Hebrew inscriptions which have been discovered in the province of Fez, and in other parts of the country.² Moreover, most of the Berber tribes in the Atlas and Rif mountains, the district of Suz, and the oases of Tafilet, possess legends and traditions connecting them with such early Jewish settlers.

In any case, whatever may be the claims of superior antiquity for those who may be designated the aboriginal Jewish inhabitants, the first really important settlement of Jews in Morocco and in the adjoining states of Fez and Suz, were in all probability composed

¹ John Davidson, *Travels in Africa*, vol. ix, p. 181.

² *Jewish Encyclopedia*,

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of refugees from the destruction of Jerusalem and the conquest of Palestine by the armies of Vespasian and Titus. For a considerable period these refugees lived under the Romans and the Vandals in a state of considerable prosperity, but under their Byzantine successors especially, and under the Emperor Justinian, whose renowned general, Belisarius, conquered the country circa 534, they experienced some oppression. The Byzantine general was accompanied during his campaign by the Greek historian Procopius, who acted as his secretary and left an account of the hostilities. The latter observed in one of his works, that he had seen "near a great Fountain, at Tangier, two columns of white stone, whereon, in the Phœnician Tongue was an Inscription to this purpose: 'We fly from the Robber Joshua, the son of Nun'. . . . Almost innumerable are the writers, ancient and modern, who make mention of this; but he (Procopius) was certainly the first introducer of it".¹ At what date this interesting record of the aboriginal inhabitants of Palestine was erected, it is of course futile to conjecture, but nearly 2,000 years had elapsed since Joshua had scattered the Canaanites, the Jebusites, and other races, before Belisarius found traces of them far away from their old home in Palestine.

¹ Morgan, *History of Algiers*.

Morocco

About the year 667 A.D., the country was attacked by the Arabs, and Jews and Berbers fought side by side against the new invaders. At this period, according to Mohammedan historians, the most powerful Berber tribe was ruled by a Jewish princess, Kahinah Dahiyah Bint Thabitah Ibn Tifan, the tribe being known as the Kahinah, and having dominion over nearly all the Berbers.¹ Dahiyah fought the Arabian general Hassan ibn al Numan, and defeated him, and the Arabs had to withdraw ; but some years later they returned, and although the Jewish princess made the most strenuous efforts, the Berbers were defeated, and their brave leader " fell near a well, which, in memory of the heroine, is still called " Bir al-Kahinah ". Dahiyah died in the year 703, and from this period, the Arabs dominated Morocco, and the religion of the Prophet became the paramount creed of the country. No doubt many of the Berber races who had adopted the Jewish faith, now embraced the tenets of Islam, although they retained certain Jewish customs and observances which their descendants practise up to this day. Other tribes which preserved their Jewish beliefs have, however, been greatly affected by their Mohammedan environment, and in language and external appearances are entirely Berber. Morocco

¹ The " Kahinah ", or " *Cohanim* ", were the descendants of the High Priest Aaron.

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was eventually placed under the rule of the Caliphate of Bagdad, and many Jewish inhabitants from that city found their way into the new Arabian province.

About twelve years before the termination of the eighth century, the Caliphate of Bagdad came to an end, and the dynasty of the Idrisids was founded by Imam Idris who speedily announced his independent possession of the Empire of Morocco. His successor, Idris II, founded the city of Fez in 808, and he colonized it to some extent with Jews from Andalusia, whom he invited to settle there, relieving them of military service on payment of 30,000 denarii, annually. During the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, the Jews in Morocco enjoyed tolerable security, coupled with a fair amount of social and intellectual progress, limited, to a certain degree, by the civil and political disabilities imposed by the Pact of Omar. Fez fell into the hands of the fanatic Almohade, Abd al Mumin, in the year 1145, and from that time until about the end of the fourteenth century, much persecution and oppression fell to the lot of the Jews of the city. Nevertheless, when the great Spanish persecution of 1391 broke out, the situation had so improved in Fez, under the more lenient rule of the Sheik Maula, that many of the Spanish fugitives found their way to the country and its capital. When the Jews were expelled from Spain, a century later, great numbers fled to Morocco

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and Fez, and in the latter country, they were enslaved by the inhabitants but were afterwards set free by Sultan Said III. This monarch set aside a large portion of the new town of Fez for their use, and protected and encouraged them. Later, in the year 1536, another large influx of Jews took place, on this occasion from Portugal. The inhuman bloodhounds of the Inquisition had hunted the Marranos from the Kingdom, and thus led to the downfall of their state by the loss of many of their most wealthy and intelligent citizens. The loss of Spain and Portugal was the gain of Morocco and the other states of Northern Africa, and thousands of enterprising and capable merchants, smaller traders and artizans, brought commerce and wealth to the Moslem countries which offered the Jewish refugees protection. Soon the new settlers succeeded in raising themselves to their proper status in their new homes. Some of them were men of superior education and ability, versed in statecraft and skilled in finance. It was not long before a few of them attained considerable rank in civic and diplomatic circles, acting in some instances as government agents, consuls, and envoys to the very countries from which they themselves had had to flee. The attachment of the Jews to the countries of their birth is one of the most amazing features of their history. Scorned, ill-treated, and oppressed as they have been in almost

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every region in which they have settled, they have ever forgiven the barbarities that have been showered on them, and even when exiled from the lands of their birth, they have often forgotten their former oppression in their love of what was once their native country. It might have been thought that the very languages of Spain and Portugal would have been abhorrent to the victims of such cruelties, but the refugees to Morocco were so numerous and their retention of their mother tongue so strenuous, that eventually the use of Arabic among the Jews of Morocco was discarded, and Spanish was adopted, an evidence of the powerful influence exercised by the new arrivals.

About the end of the sixteenth century the army of King Sebastian of Portugal was nearly annihilated during the war with Morocco, and his Kingdom was practically destroyed. Some few nobles who escaped destruction at the battle of Alcazar-Kebir "were taken captive and sold to the Jews in Fez and Morocco. The Jews received the Portuguese Knights, their former countrymen, into their houses very hospitably and let many of them go free on the promise that they would send back their ransom from Portugal".¹ Probably some of these very prisoners or their fathers had

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ix, p. 21.

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gloated over the agonies of the co-religionists of their benefactors in the auto-da-fés of the Inquisition, but the Jews are not as a people revengeful, although they have not always benefited themselves by their chivalrous attitude to their enemies.¹

In March 1554, the city of Fez "was totally pillaged by the Algerines, who found therein an immense booty ; And they being about to do the like to the Jews quarter . . . those people wisely compounded with Saha Rais (the Algerine general) for 300,000 Ducats. And because two Janissaries notwithstanding that composition, broke into Juderia, with a design to plunder, the Basha instantly caused them to be hanged up over the gate of the said Juderia, or Jews Quarter ".² Late in the sixteenth century, in the reign of Muley Hamed, a certain Samuel Palachwe (or Pacheco), was appointed Moroccan envoy to the Netherlands, and eventually settled in Holland, where he acted as consul for Morocco at the Hague. He is stated to have "proposed to Prince Maurice, the son and successor of William of Orange, that the Jews should enjoy freedom of domicile in the Netherlands",³ and that the Prince gave the proposal his support, thereby laying the

¹ [A remarkable instance of the typical attitude of the Jew towards his persecutor is that of Krushevan, the arch-Russian anti-Semite. After the Russian Revolution his children were found to be friendless and starving in exile, and were admitted and cared for in a Jewish charitable institution]. ² Morgan, *History of Algiers*. ³ J. A. J. De Villiers, *Holland and Some Jews*, p. 12.

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foundation of the important and wealthy Jewish Community in Holland which contributed in no small degree to the financial and political resuscitation of the Netherlands. In the year 1614, the Spanish Ambassador to Great Britain, brought a charge of piracy against Palachwe, alleging that the envoy had brought three prizes into Plymouth. Palachwe's "successful defence was that he was a Moroccan subject, in the service of the Sultan, then at war with Spain".¹ The Jewish diplomatist evidently did not make a fortune in the Moroccan service, for when he lay dying at the Hague, the Netherlands Parliament assisted him with a loan of six hundred guilders. He was granted a public funeral by the States General and was buried with much ceremony in the old Jewish cemetery at Ouderkerk in the year 1616.

Nearly half a century after the death of Samuel Palachwe, Menasseh ben Israel tells of another Palachwe in the service of the Kingdom of Morocco, a certain "Seignior Moseh Palache, Judge and Governor of the Jews in the city of Morocco".² About the middle of the seventeenth century, the disciples of the pseudo-Messiah, Sabbathai Zevi, did their best to arouse the enthusiasm of the Moroccan Jews in the

¹ A. M. Hyamson, *History of the Jews in England*, p. 144.

² *The Humble Address of Menasseh Ben Israel to His Highness the Lord Protector.*

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cause of this Arch-Pretender. The coming of the Messiah in the year 1666 was predicted in Morocco as it was almost everywhere else where Jews were to be found. Sasportas who had been Rabbi in Sallee wrote from England to his former congregants warning them against Sabbathai's campaign, but the letter was intercepted by one of the Pretender's agents, and eventually the Jews in this port were persecuted, and some of them had to flee in consequence of their adherence to his Movement. In the main, however, Morocco was not so deeply affected by the Messianic frenzy as some of the other Asiatic and African Kingdoms and provinces. The country was already in the throes of the civil war which eventually led to the consolidation of the Kingdoms of Morocco, Fez, and Sus into the Empire of Morocco. The Jews had quite enough to do to save their lives and property in the prevailing confusion and terror, and, despite the promises and the prophecies of the new Messiah, his adherents made little headway in a country so profoundly disturbed by internecine troubles. Eventually, however, Muley Arxid, or Reshid, the vigorous Xeriff of Tafilet, by dint of unwearied bravery and activity and unbounded treachery, succeeded in eliminating his brothers and other princes and rulers, and in making himself the sole monarch of Morocco and the neighbouring states. His enterprizes are said to have been made

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possible only by the funds provided by a wealthy Jew who was eventually betrayed and murdered by the ungrateful usurper. The tale of his perfidy is related in an interesting small quarto, published anonymously in London in 1670, which gives, *inter alia*, some little information respecting the Jews of Morocco at this period.¹ In this communication it is stated, that the Jews of Morocco “ never grow rich, but the Mohumetans do accuse them of some Crime, to have a pretence to seize upon their Treasure, as it happened lately to a Jew, who was grown a petty Prince ; he commanded a Place strong by Situation and Art, called Darbin-meshaal (according to Basnage, Dar Michael) ; there was but one ascent, and that so difficult, that without his leave all the Moors of Barbary might have spent their Daies in the siege of it. . . . This Jew had won the esteem and favour of the Grandees round about by his courteous behaviour and good hospitality : for it was his custom to invite all the Persons of Note into his City, and there entertain them very kindly ; this dealing made every one, especially the Arabs, to love him, and got him a great name. When Muley Archeid, otherwise called Taffaletta, flung himself into the protection of the Arabs, and that they had all owned him for their Prince, he was also entertained by this

¹ *A Letter from a Gentleman of the Lord Ambassador Howard's Retinue to his friend in London, dated at Fez, Nov. 1, 1669.*

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courteous Jew, and at a small provocation, he was massacred ; Taffaletta found one Point in the Law of Mahomet to justify the Murder which was approved of and applauded by the ignorant Multitude ". Basnage partially confirms this account, stating that Muley Arxid " must have miscarry'd had he not found a Jew vastly rich, whom he stripp'd of all his Treasures, by means of which he assembled the Inhabitants of the Province, was elected King, and dispossessed his brother King of Fez and Morocco ". He adds, however, that Muley Arxid " acknowledged the Service the Jew had done him, by granting the Nation the same Liberty it had enjoyed, making Joshua Ben Amossech Prince of it ". It is, however, significant of the really brutal character of Arxid that when (according to Chenier), he took the town of Morocco in 1670, " at the desire of the inhabitants he caused the Jewish Councillor and Governor of the Ruling Prince Abu Bekr together with the latter and his whole family, to be publicly burned, in order to inspire terror among the Jews ".¹

Notwithstanding the cruelty shown by Muley Arxid to some of his Jewish subjects, he placed certain favourites of that faith in trusted and prominent positions, both at his court, and in his kingdom generally,

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ix, p. 22.

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and much evidence of this is to be found in works dealing with the Morocco of this period. Muley Ismail who succeeded his brother Muley Arxid, continued his brother's attitude to the Jews, as while oppressing and taxing them heavily, he made confidants and prominent officers of a few selected and trustworthy individuals. This Sultan had been previously Governor of Mequinez, a post to which he had been appointed by his brother Muley Arxid, and, while there, a certain Don Joseph de Toledo (otherwise known as Joseph Toledani) was of great service to him and enjoyed his confidence. Joseph's father, Daniel Toledano, had also been a confidant of Muley Ismail. He was a native of Mequinez, and had been made a Councillor of State. A Hebrew scholar, as well as a statesman, he was a friend of Jacob Sasportas, the famous Rabbi. Another son of Daniel, Hyam Toledano, was subsequently appointed Ambassador to Holland and England, by Muley Ismail. Joseph Toledani was eventually appointed one of the principal officers of Sultan Ismail's household and was subsequently sent as envoy to the courts of several European princes. He was also deputed to draw up and conclude the Articles of Peace between Morocco and the United Provinces in the year 1684. During the disturbances which ensued in Morocco after the death of Muley Arxid, Ismail besieged the city of Fez, and the town was surrendered to

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him after negotiations had been conducted with a Jewish envoy sent to the Sultan by the Chief of the City.

Two other well-known councillors and officers of Muley Ismail, were Memaran (or Maimaran) and Moses Ben Hattar (or 'Attar), both distinguished inhabitants of Mequinez. Windus, in his *Journey to Mequinez*, tells a story of the rivalries of the two Jewish courtiers, which is corroborated by other authorities. "Memaran being formerly Chief Favourite, had the sole command of the Jews ; but, seeing Ben Hattar boldly push himself forward, and fearing a rival in the Emperor's Favour, he endeavoured to destroy him, and offered the Emperor so many quintals of Silver for his Head ; Upon which he (the Emperor) sent for Ben Hattar, and telling him that a Sum of Money was bid for his Head : He resolutely answered, That he would give twice as much for the Person's who offered it : Then the Emperor bringing them together, took the Money from both ; told them ' They were a couple of Fools ', and bid them be friends. Which made Ben Hattar desire Memaran's daughter in Marriage, who being granted to him, they now between them govern the Jews of his Dominions with absolute authority".

When, in the reign of George I, the Hon. Charles Stewart was sent with a British Squadron "to cruize against the Sally Rovers", and to act as

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“ Plenipotentiary to treat of Peace with the Emperor of Morocco ”, he was met at Tetuan Bay by Moses Ben Hattar, who had been sent by the Emperor to arrange the terms of peace. Windus remarks that Ben Hattar “ had often been employed in the former Treaties, and was a Person more artful and interested than any other in the Country, and chiefly to be considered, in regard he had it more in his power to make the Negotiations successful, or defeat it as he had done that of others ”.¹ Moses Ben Hattar duly signed the Articles of Peace, which were then submitted to the Emperor for confirmation. The Jewish diplomat had unlimited powers over the Jews of Morocco, a power extending to that of life and death ; he was a personage of great importance and wealth, and on the arrival of the British Ambassador, the latter was invited to take up his residence in the Jewish courtier’s house, which “ was one of the best in Mequinez ”. One of the Articles of Peace between George I of England and Muley Ismail provided that “ the same Liberty shall be granted to the Subjects of the Emperor of Morocco residing in the Dominions of his Britannic Majesty, which is given to the English Consul in Barbary, to name a Person, or Persons, to decide the Differences that may happen between the Subjects of His Imperial Majesty, a Moor for the Moors, and a Jew for the Jews ”.

¹ *A Journey to Mequinez.* London, 1725.

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Ismail's successor, Muley Mohammed, attempted still further to oppress the Jews by special taxation, but the project was opposed by his eldest son who was Governor of Fez and stated that the Jews of Fez were unable to bear even the ordinary taxes with which they were burdened. This prince had a Jewish Minister named Elijah-ha-Levi, who had at one time been sold as a slave, but who had gained the favour of the Moroccan Prince".¹ In the year 1789, the Emperor Muley Yazed ascended the throne on the death of the Sultan Mohammed. He was an extremely ferocious ruler who set no bounds to his cruelties. Almost immediately on his accession he instituted a merciless persecution of the Jews, who, he contended, had supported his brother in his contest for the throne. He also maintained that the Jews of Tetuan had insulted him, and "he ordered a general plunder of that unhappy people there, which was carried into effect in a most destructive way, with all its attendant horrors of insult and violation on the part of the soldiery".² The richer Jews of Tetuan were tied to the tails of horses and dragged through the city, and many Jews were killed and robbed, and Jewesses outraged in the cities of Morocco and Tetuan. In Fez, Mogador, Mequinez, Tangiers, and other towns

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ix, p. 23.

² Jackson, *Algiers*.

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terrible cruelties were enacted, and many of the Jews fled to Gibraltar and other places. Some died as martyrs ; others were converted to Mohammedanism. Among the latter was Elijah ha-Levi, the former minister of the despot's brother in Fez, but, tormented by his apostasy, the ex-minister only survived his conversion to the creed of Islam for a few days.¹ Many fearful deeds of barbarity to the Jews are related of this monster during the four years of his reign over Morocco. His inhumanity, however, led to his death, for many of his provinces rebelled, although unsuccessfully, and in one of the battles near the city of Morocco, he was severely wounded, and died " in the most excruciating torture ", in the year 1794.²

Although Muley Yazed's successor, Muley Solyman, was a mild and humane ruler as compared with his predecessor, the position of the Jews in Morocco continued to be one of misery and ill-treatment. " The nineteenth century, which brought emancipation to the Jews of most lands, left those of Morocco, on the whole, in their old state of sad monotony and stagnation. Every new war in which Morocco became involved resulted in some persecution of the Jews, and the contest with France in 1844 brought new oppression of the unhappy Jewish inhabitants. The miseries

¹ Jost, *Geschichte der Juden*.

² Buffa, *The Empire of Morocco*.

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endured by them led to the visit of Sir Moses Montefiore to the country in 1863, and after negotiations between him and the Sultan, an edict was published granting equal rights of justice to the Jews. Although, in theory, full protection was granted to them by such edicts and proclamations, in practice, matters did not improve much. The local authorities had very little power over the populace, and dared not carry out the regulations for the protection of the Jews, as the enmity between them and the Moslems broke out on the slightest provocation. The only real protection obtained by Jews in Morocco was from the foreign consulates, and only a comparatively small number could obtain these privileges, as the government attempted by every means to limit the number. Benjamin II stated when he visited the country in 1854, that "as soon as the soil of civilized Algeria is exchanged for Morocco, dangers of every kind begin". Nevertheless, he was informed that over 100,000 Israelites were resident in Morocco although "persecution, oppression, hatred and fanaticism surround our fellow-worshippers on all sides. . . . It is only in the large harbour towns that the consuls take care that the Europeans find some protection and justice; but in the interior the oppression is all the greater".¹

¹ Benjamin II, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa*.

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According to the *Jewish Year Book* of 1919, the Jewish population of Morocco amounted to 109,712 souls, or a little over two per cent. of the general population.

CHAPTER XIII

MOROCCO (*continued*)

An Early Moroccan Synagogue—Leo Africanus—Jewish Soldiers in Morocco—The Spanish and Portuguese Refugees—Jewish Artizans and Craftsmen—The Palachwes—Frejus and Pariente—Mouette's Account—Addison and Ockley—Moses Edrehi and the Jews of the Atlas Range—Davidson's Fatal Journey—Walter B. Harris and Modern Morocco.

NOTHING absolutely authentic can be related concerning the *ancient* Jewish inhabitants of Morocco, even though the colonists of Borion, or Borium¹ claim that King Solomon himself built their temple, which was transformed into a church by the Emperor Justinian in the sixth century.² The author Marcus Fisher, however, in his work entitled *The History of the Jews under Mohammedan Rule, and Imam Idris*, gives considerable information respecting the Jewish refugees who colonized Morocco after the destruction of the Temple. At a later period, the Jews of Morocco were evidently at times supporters of Imam Idris, while at others they

¹ "Borium was a town on the borders of the Pentapolis where the Jews are said to have had a splendid Temple or more probably a fine Synagogue". See Milman, *The History of the Jews*.

² *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ix, p. 18.

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fought him, but they were by no means successful in their opposition to that potentate. They were on better terms with his successor, Idris II, and during some centuries noteworthy Jewish scholars lived in Morocco. This may be accepted as a fair indication of the comparatively peaceful state of the Jewish population. When the Almohades commenced to harass the Jews, they compelled them to wear a very prominent yellow covering for the head, and from that period, their clothing began to occupy a prominent position in the regulations which were from time to time enacted on their behalf. The mob, once given a lead by national legislation against the Jews, proceeded to further and unauthorized persecution, and for a considerable period the unhappy people was treated with contemptuous scorn and brutal persecution, from the results of which they have never really recovered. In the middle of the fifteenth century many misfortunes befell the Jews of Fez. A famine succeeded a fire, and in the two catastrophes, it is stated that over 20,000 Israelites perished. Nevertheless, every Jew or Marrano who could escape from Spain or Portugal fled to North Africa, where, despite scorn, cruelty, and robbery, they were at least allowed to profess their religion without being burnt at the stake. At the end of the fifteenth century, the King of Portugal discovered his mistake and endeavoured to stop the

Morocco (*continued*)

Jewish exodus by proclamations, but it was too late, and nearly every Jew who had money with which to bribe or wit to escape fled from the barbarians of the Iberian Peninsula.

The tragic results of the policy of the Portuguese did not, however, come home to them for nearly a century later. At the commencement of the fifteenth century when "the empire of Morocco was in a condition of political disintegration and moral decay . . . the Portuguese had possession of the best parts . . . and were gradually extending their outposts into the interior".¹ About this period the traveller Leo Africanus was brought as a child to Africa, his father having been a victim of the fanaticism of the Spanish monarchs in their policy against the Moors and the Jews. Leo tells us a good deal about the Jews of Morocco which cannot be learnt from other sources. Benjamin of Tudela seems to have avoided the Barbary States as far as possible and evidently had no great opinion of the Jews of any of the North Central or the North-Western countries of Africa. Little also is to be gleaned from the pages of other authors of this era. In the year 1506, when Leo was about twelve years of age, he accompanied an official sent to Tefza by the Sultan of Morocco, "to receive the fifty thousand

¹ Leo Africanus, *History and Description of Africa*.

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ducats' fine from the Jews, who ' were said ' to favour the King's enemies ". We are also told of a great army of mercenary Jewish soldiers who, living on and about the mountain of Demenfera, were led by " diverse princes, and are continually in armes, and they are reputed and called by other Jewes in Africa, Carraum (probably Chairem), that is to say heretiques. . . . I heard divers of their principal men avouch that they were able (circa 1520) to bring into the field five and twenty thousand most expert soldiers ". All kinds of trades and professions were pursued by the Jews, who were by no means confined to the capitals of the provinces, but resided as well in the smaller towns and villages. Many of them acted as bankers, changers of foreign money and agents, and they appear to have had the sole right of minting money, besides which, the law, prohibiting Mohammedans from practising the trade of goldsmiths, marked out a lucrative pursuit for them, in which many no doubt possessed expert knowledge brought from Spain and Portugal. There were Jewish artificers and artizans who exercised " divers handie-crafts ", as well as of other Jews engaged as merchants, makers of wine, inn-keepers, and vintners, and of Jewish architects who had been employed in the designing of the " Arab structures of Spain and Morocco ".

As a matter of fact, the later Jewish arrivals in

Morocco (*continued*)

Morocco were a great acquisition to their newly-adopted country. "With their skill in the practise of commerce as carried out in European centres, with their knowledge of arts and industries, many of which were entirely unknown to the other inhabitants of the country, and with the wealth that they contrived to bring with them, despite the greed of their persecutors, they were able to contribute in no little measure to the rise and development of the Moroccan Empire under the rule of the Tafi let sherifs who came into prominence about the middle of the sixteenth century".¹ In the main, the second half of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries formed a peaceful era for the Jews of Morocco. They appear, however, to have systematically assisted the Portuguese in their hostilities with the Moors, and in particular they aided the people of Saffee, who were besieged, and acted as negotiators for the Portuguese in many of the agreements which were arranged between them and their adversaries. Menasseh ben Israel, writing to Cromwell in 1655, remarks that "In the Kingdome of Barbary, there lives also a great number of Jewes, who (are) ever cruelly and basely used by that Barbarous Nation, except at Morocco, the Court and Kings house, where they have their Naquid or Prince that governs them,

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ix, p 21.

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and is their Judge, and is called at this day Seignor Moseh Palache: and before him was in the same Court, that Noble family Ruthes, that had power and jurisdiction of all kinds of punishment, onely life and death excepted".¹

As a matter of fact, despite the insults and grievances to which the Jews were subjected, there can be little doubt that their leaders exercised considerable power and influence in court circles in Morocco at this period. In a quarto pamphlet entitled *The Moors Baffled*, which relates to circumstances concerning the City of Tangier under the rule of Andrew, Earl of Teviot, circa 1663, there is abundant evidence of the care exercised by the British Governor in dealing with the Jews.² The anonymous author, in the course of some rather uncomplimentary remarks, mentions Lord Teviot's carefulness "to carry an Equal Hand in all Controversies that happened betwixt the Christians and the Jews that were residing upon the Place. He was no stranger to the latter, and now it was their interest to favour the Concerns of the Moors, as being the most of them born amongst them and greatly sympathized in their customs. Besides many of them were only come to Tangier to trade, having left their Wives and

¹ *To His Highness the Lord Protector . . . The Humble Address of Menasseh Ben Israel.* ² *The Moors Baffled*, by George Lord Rutherford.

Morocco (*continued*)

Children in the Moors Dominions. But besides that both by Nature and Religion he was inclined to an impartial Justice; he knew that to do otherwise, would soon open the mouth of a clamorous Jew, loudly to traduce him to the Moors; and thereby instill an ill opinion both of his person and religion".¹ Muley Arxid, who reigned at this period, was one of the worst of the Moroccan persecutors of the Jews, and his extortions were mainly carried out by his Jewish tax-collector, Joshua ben Amossech. At his succession, Muley Arxid caused the synagogues in the city of Morocco and other towns to be demolished, and they were not re-erected until the advent of his successor to the throne. During his reign, the manufacture of wines and spirits by the Jews was considerably developed, as Arxid forced them "to supply wine to the Christian slaves as he found that it made them work better", and this industry continues in the hands of the Jews up to the present day.²

In the year 1666, Sieur Roland Frejus of Marseilles, was sent to Morocco by King Louis XIV of France, to promote the establishment of trade between the two countries, and he was well received by Muley Arxid. Frejus employed a Jew named Jacob Pariente as his interpreter and agent, and the latter rendered most

¹ *The Moors Baffled*.

² *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ix, p. 22.

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valuable services to the Embassy, arranging the audiences with the Sultan and keeping the French envoy well posted with regard to the position of affairs in Morocco. Pariente appears to have been well known and respected, and his friendship with Aaron Carsines, the Jewish goldsmith of Muley Arxid, paved the way for friendly negotiations. In short, Frejus did very little without the advice of his Jewish agent, and succeeded in his mission extremely well. As Pariente did not know a word of French the Spanish language was used at all the interviews. Here and there in Frejus' narrative, we get glimpses of the influence of the Jews in Muley Arxid's Court; his almoner was a Jew named Carsenay, and we are also told of a certain Isa ben Samuel, who showed the French envoy many civilities.¹

Issued in the same year as Frejus' *Voyage into Mauritania*, and by the same publisher, was *A Letter . . . concerning the Religion, Manners, and Customs of the Countrys of Muley Arxid*. . . . By Mons. A., "who lived twenty-five years in the Kingdom of Sus and Morocco". The little pamphlet was published in 1671, but this account of Morocco evidently relates to a period about twenty years earlier, and the description of the Jews given is very clear and interesting. "The

¹ *Relation of a Voyage into Mauritania*, by the Sieur Roland Frejus. . . . English'd out of French.—Minimop, 1671.

Morocco (*continued*)

Jews", it says, "are very busily meddlesome in all sorts of Commerce, and in the Farms, taking usually the Kings Customes to Farm, wherefore there they are called Farmers, and for this reason, whosoever Trafficks there, must often pass through their fingers. . . ." They "have no Lands there in propriety unless it is some gardens about their Houses, out of which they make some Wine, but not enough for their own use ; so that they . . . are forced to make use of Pass-wine, or Raisin Wine, for they call raisin of the Sun Pass.¹ . . . The Jews wear a shirt, Drawers, a black Close-coat or Caffetan, and over it a black or dark coloured kind of Cloak, which they call Albernous, made with a Cowle like a Fryers Frock, but that there hangs down strings at the end of the Cowle and at the bottom. They have a black Cap, and black Pumps and Slippers. . . ." It is stated that about a half a mile from the Great Mosque at Morocco, "is a great enclosure with High Walls, and there is the Jews Habitation, they are numerous and have a Synagogue, and a very fair House ; To their enclosure they have but one great gate which the Porter shuts every night and opens in the morning". The writer was evidently disgusted at the state of the coinage and maintained

¹ Raisin wine is used by Jews in all parts of the world for religious purposes, and especially for the ceremonies connected with the Passover.

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that there was no "currant money of Mauritania", as it was fearfully debased. The old ducats of gold, he remarks, were excellent, "but", says Mons. A., "every roguish Jew melts down and coins ducats after his own fashion, and impudently do it in their publick shops, and for this there is no order taken; so that there are Ducats of several sorts and several prices".¹

Basnage asserts that many Jews lived in Sus, and that the capital of that province possessed "a rich and fine Synagogue, served by many Priests; and their own Judges and interpreters of the Law, paid by their Nation, that lived upon Labour and Trade. There are in the Mountains of the Kingdom of Morocco, Farriers and Smiths, and People that serve to build their houses, because the inhabitants think this work too laborious. But they are not always employed in such sort of Works; for they often force themselves into Court, and enter into offices".

Some of the Jewish rabbis in Morocco in the seventeenth century attained to considerable eminence. Among these may be mentioned Jacob Sasportas, and Samuel Zarfati. Sasportas came of a well-known Spanish family of rabbis and scholars, and after having been made Rabbi of Morocco, Fez, and other places,

¹ *The Religion, Manners and Customs of the Countrys of Nuley Arxid.*—By Mons. A.

Morocco (*continued*)

“ was imprisoned by the Moorish King ” in 1646. He fled to Amsterdam, and remained there till 1659, when he returned to Morocco and was sent by the King on a special mission to the Spanish Court. Later, Sasportas occupied positions as Rabbi in London and Amsterdam.

The Sabbathai Zevi movement had some curious, but not important consequences in Morocco. For several years the fast-day commemorating the destruction of Jerusalem was celebrated as a day of feasting. Prayer houses were changed for the occasion into places of festivity ; all mourning was turned into joy. A French traveller relates that while he was in Sallee, a Dutch ship arrived there with some Jews on board who announced “ that the long-looked-for Messiah would be born in Holland at the beginning of the ensuing year (1672). The Jews, hearing of this good news, made a second feast of Tabernacles, and held a general rejoicing and treating for eight days together ”.¹ The Sieur Mouette, who is responsible for the above statements, gave a concise account of the position of the Jews of Morocco at this period. He remarked that they had a sheikh of their own in every town, either chosen by them, or appointed by the Emperor, who collected the taxes due to the State. The Jews rarely visited the country districts as when there they went in danger of their lives, and justice was rarely exercised

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ix, p. 22.

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on their behalf. If brought before a local governor or justice, any attempt at defence led to insult and ill-treatment. Even at their funerals, the Jews were attacked by boys who were not hindered from throwing stones and using every kind of maledictory expression. In the meantime, despite all their troubles, they managed to provide for their poor, although heavily taxed by every official who could legally or illegally oppress them financially.¹

This position of affairs as regards the Jews of Morocco in the reign of Muley Arxid is confirmed by the Rev. Lancelot Addison, father of the poet, one of the Chaplains of Charles II, who wrote two books dealing mainly with the countries of West Barbary, with special reference to the Jews.² According to this writer the Moors did not allow the Jews to be in possession of any weapon of defence, unless it was for purposes of trade. They were bullied and hectored by the Moors, and their children were ill-treated by the Moorish children while resistance or retaliation was impossible. Jews born and bred in the country differed little in their costume from the Moors. They wore "little black brimless Caps", instead of the red Fez used by the other inhabitants, but went slip-shod

The Travels of the Sieur Mouette in the Kingdoms of Fez and Morocco. ² *West Barbary. The Present State of the Jews . . . in Barbary.*

Morocco (*continued*)

like the rest of the Moors. They were accustomed to wear linen drawers and vests, over which they put a loose garment called a *Ganephe*, which differed only in colour from the *Mandilion* or *Albornoz*, which the Moors bestowed upon the Christians when they were redeemed from slavery. "This *Ganephe* is a black square piece of course Hair-stuff, closed at the cross corners, and all round, it is a large Thrum, which at first sight looks like their Religious Fringes. . . ." Addison affords a very interesting chapter on the marriage customs of the Jews of Morocco, together with extracts from the Marriage Service, and descriptions of many quaint ceremonies prevalent in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, but it is observed, that as a rule, no Christians were admitted to these celebrations, "unless such are their slaves".

A curious account of South-West Barbary was published in the year 1713, by Simon Ockley, professor of "Arabick" in the University of Cambridge. Ockley does not claim to be the author of the work, but maintains that the manuscript came accidentally into his hands some years before the book was printed. The author does not appear to have had much sympathy with the Jewish race, whose members he accuses of insulting the founder of Christianity, in their synagogues at Easter or Passover. This custom, he maintains, is not confined to the Jews of Barbary, "but

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even in Amsterdam, they are arrived at this height of Insolence against Heaven as to Practise it frequently there ". According to his account, in the " Mellah " or Ghetto of the town of Morocco, although the ordinary houses were small and low, many of the residences were magnificent, and several princes and ambassadors chose to live there. The Jews were the chief traders in the country, " and . . . by their associates supply the Moors with all necessaries . . . so that the Moors have their dependence on the Jews, as most of them have theirs upon the Christian Merchants, who supply them with Goods, whereby they are enabled to Pay those exorbitant Taxes that are imposed on them ".¹ It is observed that although there is little trade in their town and villages, the Jewish Sabbath is easily distinguished from other days of the week, " for then all the Tents of the Shops both of Moors and Jews are shut up . . . and it were well if the Christians were as strict in the observance of their Day of Religious worship. But alas! their merchants constantly on Sundays have a Market or Fair in their Houses from Morning 'till Night ; where abundance of Jews and Moors meet together to weigh Wax, Copper, Hides, &c., and to buy Nails, Iron, Linnen, Tobacco, Brimstone, Cochenal, and other sorts of dyes ". The writer charges the Jews with living meanly and being

¹ *Account of S.W. Barbary.*

Morocco (*continued*)

addicted to drinking—a charge rarely brought against them elsewhere. He states that although they are just as adverse to work as the Moors, they are more ingenious, “and exceed them in all their Cruelty and Malice to the Christians”.

According to Windus, in his *Journey to Mequinez*, the Jews of Morocco were charged with preferring their own people to all others. He suggests that they believed that “they might cheat . . . with a safe conscience”, all the rest of mankind, “provided they give some part of the gain to raise the Fortune of such of their own as are fallen to decay, and to keep their Poor from begging : in this particular, their Charity is wonderfull”.¹ Chenier, who was French Consul for a considerable period in Morocco about the last quarter of the eighteenth century, remarks of the Jews that they were not allowed to possess land or estates, or to cultivate gardens. They had to wear black clothes and to walk barefoot when passing mosques or sanctuaries. The law of the country was nearly always strained in favour of the Mohammedans. “Notwithstanding this state of oppression, the Jews have many advantages over the Moors : they better understand the spirit of trade ; they act as agents and brokers, and they profit by their own cunning and the ignorance of the Moors. In their commercial bargains

¹ *Journey to Mequinez.*

The Jews of Africa

many of them buy up the commodities of the country to sell again. Some have European correspondents, others are mechanics, such as goldsmiths, tailors, gunsmiths, millers and masons. More industrious and artful, and better informed than the Moors, the Jews are employed by the Emperor in receiving the customs, in coining money, and in all affairs and intercourse which the monarch has with the European merchants, as well as in all his negotiations with the various European governments".¹

Some of the most curious, if unreliable, statements about Morocco in recent times, are to be found in a volume written by a Rabbi who was a native of the country in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The author tells us in a footnote that the information he affords is not generally known, as "all communications by printing is entirely and rigorously prohibited". He gives some account of a town named Dubdo, which he calls a "peculiar and a very great wonder in the kingdom of Morocco". This place, he contends, "has a fine climate and a beautiful air, and there are a great many fine gardens. The town is built on a very high mountain". In his time (circa 1830) he says, there were 700 Jewish families residing there, all Cohanim (priests), together with a few (mere) Israelites who are very rich. The place was evidently

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ix, p. 24.

Morocco (*continued*)

under the same conditions as apply to other districts in the Atlas Mountains—a kind of feudal arrangement by which the Jews are protected by one or more chiefs or individuals. It is remarked that “the Jews’ masters, if anything wrong happens to any of them, makes a complaint to the master of the one injured, and he satisfies him. They would sooner kill twenty men than one Jew”. The Jews have to make their masters presents two or three times a year, but “by that they have great protection, and live very happily together in that town”, where none of the inhabitants pays any duty or contribution to the government.¹ The arrangement between the Jews and their protectors in the towns and districts in and abutting on the Atlas range, is also noted by Davidson, and Mr. Walter B. Harris, but neither mentions the town of Dubdu, although it is quite possible that the place alluded to as Coubba, or Cobba, by Davidson, is the same. The latter wrote about the same period as Edrehi, and Coubba had then between 3,000 and 4,000 people, and allowing five persons to a family, this would bring Edrehi’s 700 families to 3,500 inhabitants. Davidson greatly regretted that he could not get to Coubba owing to heavy falls of snow. Another writer speaks of Dubdu lying on an eastern affluent of the Moluya river, and states that above the town rises a vertical bluff

¹ Edrehi, *Historical Account of the Ten Tribes*.

The Jews of Africa

crowned* with a minaret and a dismantled fortress. "The place consists (circa 1899) of about four hundred earthen houses", and is the only town in the Moroccan empire "where the Jews are in a majority. All are engaged in trade, their commercial relation extending eastwards to Tlemsen in Algeria, westwards to Fez".¹

It is not very easy to follow Edrehi's remarks, as the writer is always rambling from one subject to another, but according to his statement, in certain towns in Morocco, Levites were not allowed. Whether this was the case in Dubdo (or Dubdu according to Buffa's Map ²), is not very clear, but Edrehi is very emphatic about the prohibition against them in Tlemcen (or Telmsan, as he calls it). As a matter of fact he remarks, "it is very extraordinary, that in that town the Levites are not permitted to remain twenty-four hours; if one should remain, the climate kills him directly, and nobody knows the reason how that is". According to this writer the Jewish population of Mequinez at this period (circa 1830) was thirty-five thousand *families*, but as the total population is given as one hundred thousand *inhabitants*, there is evidently some confusion in the good Rabbi's figures and estimates. The Jews, he says, have a town of their

¹ Reclus, *Universal Geography*, vol. ii. ² Dubdu is marked on this map as on the borders of the Atlas Mountains nearly one hundred miles from the Coast, or over one hundred and fifty from Ceuta to the north-west.

Morocco (*continued*)

own, irregularly fortified and guarded by a strong force under the direction of an Alcaid, who is styled the "Governor of the Jews". Edrehi paints the position of the Jews in Morocco very differently from the picture of other writers, and he asserts that "they are esteemed and beloved by the whole nation", and "are employed for the principal offices". He remarks that in the new city of Fez "they have the whole town for themselves; no other nations live among them, only consuls and some European merchants, and through business and intercourse of language, etc., they are sociable together". In the old town, it is said, the house of Maimonides still exists, but it is shut up, and nobody is allowed to dwell in it. "They can see it, and all the articles inside, but nobody can come near it, for a particular reason", etc.

Early in the nineteenth century John Buffa, a doctor of medicine, resided for a time in Morocco, and his volume of travels in that country affords a lively account of the Empire at this period. In March, 1806, he visited Tetuan and, on landing, was received by the British vice-consul, an opulent native Jew. He was conducted to the Jewish quarter and spent the evening with some Barbary Jews, and the next morning on his visit to the Governor, "was not a little surprised to see our Vice-consul pull off his slippers as we passed the mosques, and walk bare-footed. I soon learned,

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that the Jews are compelled to pay this tribute of respect". It did not follow, however, that this practice was "compelled" by law, as in some cases these customs were exacted by the mob, notwithstanding any legislation to the contrary. "For example the sultan Sulaiman (1795-1822), decreed that the Jews of Fez might wear shoes; but so many Jews were killed in broad daylight in the streets of that city that they themselves asked the sultan to repeal the edict". Twenty thousand Jews resided in Tetuan. They were "tolerably civilized in their manners but dreadfully oppressed by the Moors. Seldom a day passed but some gross outrage or violence is offered to the Jewish women, the generality of whom are very handsome, though their dress is by no means calculated to set off, but rather to detract from their beauty". The costume of the ladies was stated to be rich in material, but so heavy, that it appeared awkward and unbecoming, and the use of enormous ear-rings did not add to its attractiveness. They rarely went out, but spent their leisure on the roofs of the houses, which were often very dirty. The Jews are said to have married very young; "it is not at all unusual to see a married couple, whose united ages do not exceed twenty-two or twenty-three years".¹

Jackson, who wrote an account of the city of

¹ Buffa, *The Empire of Morocco*.

Morocco (*continued*)

Morocco in 1817, remarks that the Jews of the town were governed by an Alcaid to whom they applied for protection against insult and injury. Only two thousand families continued to reside in the city, as large numbers of them had fled to the mountains where they were less oppressed. It is stated that "the Jew can neither shift his place of residence, nor ride a horse, nor wear a sword without special permission. Yet under all these vexations and degrading circumstances, a Jew renegado is scarcely known they are allowed the free exercise of their religion, and it would seem as if this indulgence were considered a compensation for all their sufferings".¹ Davidson, who visited the city some eighteen years later, remarks on the filthy state of the Jewish quarter, in which he estimated there were about 5,000 Jews and Jewesses, exclusive of the children, who were very numerous. The traveller was supposed to live at the Sultan's expense, but this arrangement resulted in everything costing him about four times as much as if he had had to buy everything himself. The Sheik of the Jews had been instructed to receive the orders for everything required, and the money spent was to be deducted from the Jewish tax "which is only 1,000 dollars a year".² Among other places Davidson visited was a town or village named Trasermoot, in the Atlas Mountains. He describes it

¹ Jackson, *Algiers*.

² John Davidson, *Travels in Africa*.

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as a kind of Gibraltar in miniature. "I went in the evening", he says, "to dine with the Jews—here called the sons of Yehudi: they are a most extraordinary people. I never met with such hospitality, or such freedom of manners in any Jews. They had dancing and music, and the ladies mixed in society without the least restraint. . . . These are the Jews who have each a Berber master".

Many writers have given accounts of the peculiar position of the Jews in the Atlas Mountains, who in some respects appear to be in a similar condition to the people who lived under the feudal system in the Middle Ages. In some cases they are under the direct protection of the local sheikh, in others, of private individuals, for whom they have to do various services and who can sell the right of these services to others. "They may not marry or remove their families till they have received permission from their so-called protectors; and without this protection they would not be safe for a day. . . . On the other hand, outsiders are permitted to do them no injury, which would be considered as inflicted upon their protector ("kasi"), who makes the duty of avenging such injury a point of honour. . . . In travelling it is sufficient for the protégé to insure his safety, to bear some article belonging to his master, written documents being scarce, with few to understand them. . . . Centuries

Morocco (*continued*)

of this oppression have naturally had a very deleterious effect upon the characters of the victims, who are cringing, cowardly creatures, never daring to answer back, and seldom even standing erect—a people demanding the utmost pity”.¹ Davidson, in describing this system, remarks that at Trasermoot (Mount Atlas) every Jew has his master, but in Wari-Kah, there appeared to be one chief, while “on the mountain there are two ; in other places there are three and so on. The annual tax is a ducat for the head of each family ; but they have to entertain and provide for all who come in the Sultan’s name : they are the most intelligent I have met with”. At Tafilet, Davidson was greatly mystified, and remarked, “The Jews here puzzle me sadly : they have an air of freedom and defiance”.

Writing about sixty years later than Davidson, Mr. Walter B. Harris found practically the same conditions existing among the Jews of Dads and Tafilet. He remarks, “the families of Jews here too live in a feudal state, each being dependent upon some Shleh family for immunity from ill-treatment and robbery : in return for this they pay a small yearly tribute to their protectors. As a rule they are the skilled workmen of the place, being particularly renowned at Dads for their guns, which are often gorgeously decorated in

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ix, p. 28.

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silver". In Tafilet "each Jew family lives under the protection of some Moslem, be he Arab or Berber . . . any injury suffered by the Jew is revenged by the protecting Berber as though it had been committed to a member of his own family. In this manner the Israelites are able to live in tolerable security from murder and theft". At Mogador, Davidson found the Jewish population nearly equal to that of Morocco city. The Jews were better housed and in better circumstances. The Jewish women were very beautiful, and the men, as a rule, dressed in European costume, and many of them spoke English. The writer was invited to dine in the Mellah, and was hospitably entertained, learning much about the cabbalists and their conversations with the Almighty and the angels, etc., etc. During Davidson's residence in Mogador he wrote a letter to the Duke of Sussex giving a most extraordinary account of the Jews of Coubba or Cobba, a place he intended to visit, although he could never carry out his project.¹

At Madnoon there was a small Jewish colony "who are the working classes and manufacture good guns, daggers, ornaments in silver, brass, etc. They are also the tailors, and do the iron work". Davidson speaks somewhat enthusiastically of the beauty of the Jewish women, and remarks "the Jewesses bear away

¹ See Note I, p. 187.

Morocco (*continued*)

the palm of beauty, and dirty as they proverbially are, they are cleanliness itself, as compared with the Arab ladies, whose filth, dirt, and misery are dreadful".¹ Mr. Walter B. Harris, who rarely mentions the Jews without a jeer or a sneer, is very insistent on the dirt of the Jews, which he emphasizes in such a manner that readers of his works must almost come to the conclusion that dirt is *their* monopoly in Morocco, as well as their "deity", as he maintains. He admits, however, that the other inhabitants do not excel in cleanliness, and remarks "wash the Bedouin lady, undo the tangles of her hair, give her clean clothes . . . and all her beauty is gone".² Of all the biassed writers against the Jews of Morocco, Mr. Harris is probably the most bitter and unjust, and he even grudges them the protection they receive from the foreign consuls, although he is good enough to say that he does not "desire to totally abolish the only safeguard the Jews have from the hands of the Moorish government". He was, he admits, at first shocked at the treatment the Jews received at Morocco, "but it soon passed off, and I have come to recognize, through intimate knowledge, that there is no tribe of men more degraded . . . or more ready to rob and plunder, than the Moorish Jew". It certainly is well that the bias of this anti-Semite

¹ *Travels in Africa*, p. 192.

² Harris, *Land of an African*

Sultan, p. 285.

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exceeds his influence, although he does not carry his criticisms of the Moorish Jews beyond "their love of swindling, their vice and drunken habits, the utter filth in which they live, their bemeaning and cringing ways"—beyond these somewhat deprecatory remarks, he admits that "there is little more to say about them".

That some small portion of these charges against the Moroccan Jews may be true is quite possible, considering the conditions under which they have lived in the country ever since they first accepted the protection so grudgingly granted. With regard to the protection afforded by the foreign consuls, a late authority writes as follows: "Nowhere in Morocco without such protection does the Jew receive common justice. From the cradle to the grave he is despised and vituperated, an apology being necessary even for an allusion to him in polite society. Every possible indignity is heaped upon him, and he enjoys neither social nor civil equality with his neighbours; they tolerate him because he renders himself indispensable and knows how, under the most unfavourable of circumstances, to amass wealth which he is always ready to put out at exorbitant interest, and of which he may be ultimately despoiled by powerful officials".¹

¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. ix, p. 28.

Morocco (*continued*)

NOTES

I. *Letter from John Davidson to H.R.H. the Duke of Sussex*

“ MOGADOR, *March 18th, 1836.*

“ SIR,

“ After a fruitless attempt to cross the western branch of Mount Atlas, owing to the unusual quantity of snow, I have been obliged to come to this place, which affords me another opportunity of taking advantage of your Royal Highness’s condescension in permitting me to address you. Having received the Sultan’s consent to cross the mountains for the purpose of visiting the Jews, I left Morocco for Mesfywa, and taking the route by Trasemoot, reached an elevation of 5,000 feet ; but here the loose character of the snow, and the uncertainty of the track, obliged me to abandon my project. I was accompanied in this journey by a Rabbi, from the district of Coubba or Cobba, to which place it was my intention to have proceeded. From this man I received much curious information, and have yet great hopes of reaching the people of whom he spoke, and to whom he belongs, before I return to England. He informed me that in this place, nearly as extensive as that in which the city of Morocco is situated, there are not less than 3,000 or 4,000 Jews living in perfect freedom, and following every variety of occupation ; that they have mines and quarries

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which they work, possess large gardens and extensive vineyards, and cultivate more corn than they can possibly consume ; that they have a form of government, and have possessed this soil from the time of Solomon ; in proof of which he stated (that) they possess a record bearing the signet and sign of Joab, who came to collect tribute from them in the time of the son of David ; that the tradition of their arrival here runs thus : ' Crossing the Great Sea to avoid the land of Egypt, they came to a head of land with a river ; that here they landed, and following the course of this leading westward, but going towards the south, they came to a spot where they found twelve wells and seventy palm-trees. This at first led them to suppose that they had by some means got to Elim ; but finding the mountains on the west, they were satisfied that they had reached a new country : finding a passage over the mountains, they crossed and took up their dwelling in this valley, first in caves, which exist in great numbers, then in others which they excavated, and after this began to build towns ; that at a distant period, they were 'driven across the mountains by a people that would not acknowledge them, and that some remained at Diminet, Mesfywa, and other places on the western side of the range '. Looking at the map, and following this man's observations, it is perfectly easy to trace them. They must have reached

Morocco (*continued*)

the gulf of Tremesen, and taking the river Muluwia, or Mahala, have reached Tafielt, where, to this day, are twelve wells planted round with seventy palm-trees and which many of the Jews call Elim ; and from this day they (must) have taken the pass to which I attempted to get. Knowing the interest your Royal Highness takes in all that refers to the history of the Jews, I have offered this man fifty dollars to obtain a copy of the record upon a skin of the same size and pattern as that which contains it, and ten dollars for the copy of two tombstones to which the Jews make their pilgrimages, and these he promises to send to the Jew agent in Morocco in six months, provided I do not in the meantime visit Coubba. On asking him, if at any period they had a great accession to their number, or if he knew anything of the breaking off of the tribes, he seemed anxious to drop the subject, and told me that the more learned men whom I should see at Coubba could better inform me ; that from time to time, Jews came to them, but that these tombs and the writings they possess contain all their history. This man returned with me. I was most anxious to know the meaning of the names of some of the towns : he told me what the Moors call Mesfywa is Oom Siwa, the Mother of Siwa, one of their families which crossed (the mountains) ; that Ourika of the Moors, distant thirty miles, was Rebka, founded by one of their daughters,

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and that most of these places had originally Hebrew names. At Ourika he left me. I continued for eight days to visit the towns inhabited by the Jews, to the number of the above one hundred, and I should say that on this side, there are more Jews dwelling with the Berbers in the mountains than resident in Morocco. They have all the same account of Coubba, and have a great belief in the Caballists, who they say still exist, and who receive direct communication from Heaven. I here send your Royal Highness a few of the names of the principal towns, but having lost my Rabbi interpreter, cannot procure the meaning of them: Argum, Roosempt, Towra, Towright, Ai Tattab, Tamazert, Zowisiderhald, Tedeeli, Tisgin (very large, two hundred families), A Mismish (one hundred and fifty families), Sefelmal, to the town on the Wad el Fis"

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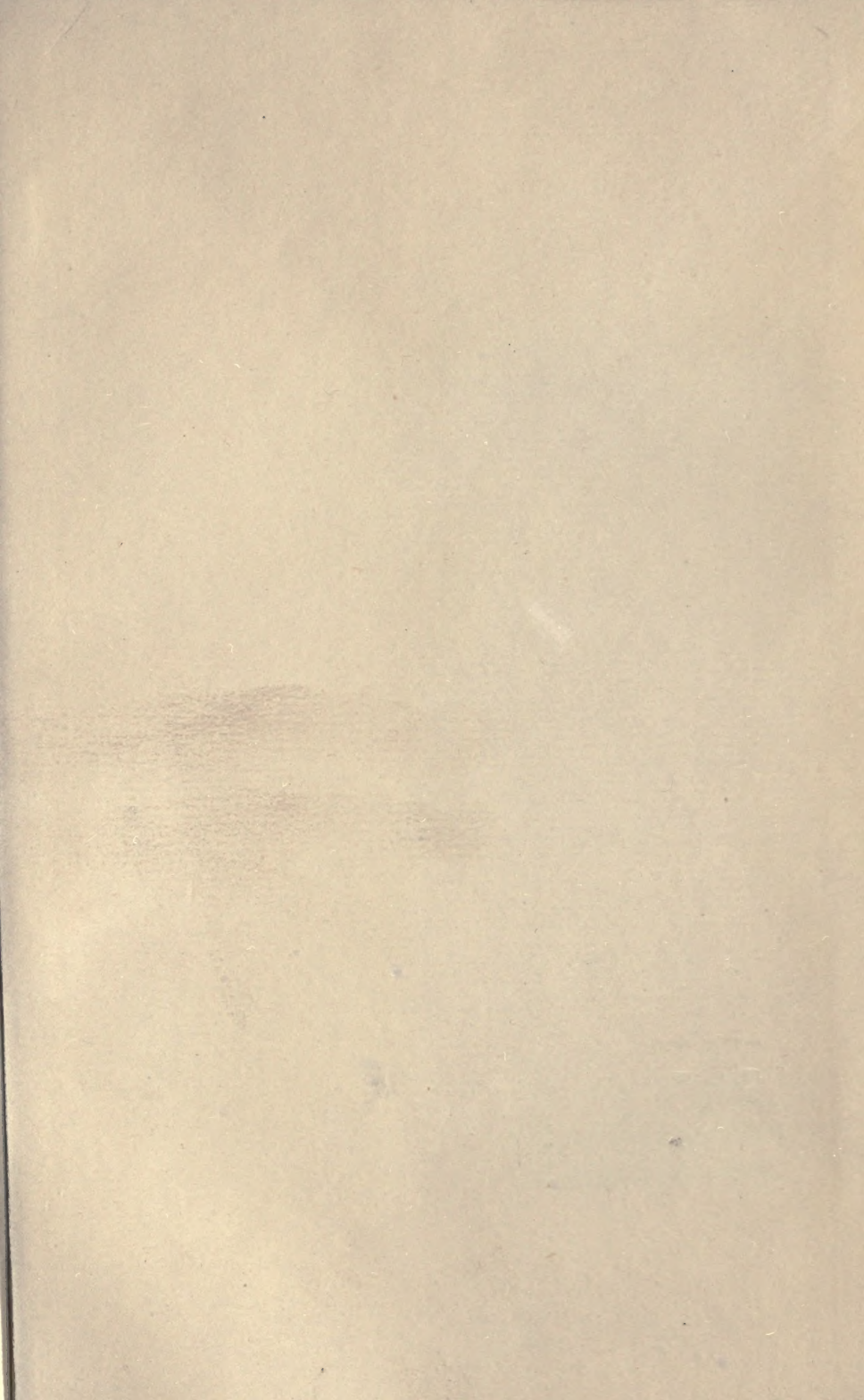
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